

Deuteronomy 28:47-48

Sunday 2/10/2013

Open your Bibles to the Book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book in the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. We will start there this morning. Look for another passage, if you would, in the Book of Genesis. That one is not going to be too hard to find; it is right before Revelation, so you can find that one. You can find the Book of Deuteronomy, and we will look at both of those this morning. We will start in Deuteronomy, and then from there, we will go to Genesis. So I would like you to find both of those.

Allow me to say a few things by way of introduction before I jump into the Scripture. I count it a great privilege to be with you all, and I am very thankful. I know very much that Pastor Bob would not give up the pulpit, and I greatly count this a privilege and honor that I can be with you all. I appreciate this church very much, and allow me to say it is a good example of what churches should be doing: thriving, growing, strengthening, and helping one another. I hope that you realize what you have here; it is a very big blessing, and I am very thankful for that.

Afterwards, I want to give you our new prayer card. We finally had a son after many daughters. My brother is getting ready to have his first child, and he is going to have a boy, and he loves to rub it in my face. I said it took me four girls before I got my boy, but I am still having, we still had our son. So I want to give you one of our prayer cards. Look at the back there, and you could pick up one of these, and we would appreciate your prayer very much. We appreciate this church and the many things that you all stand for.

For a long time, I had CDs in my car in Argentina, believe it or not, and I had these CDs of Bob's preaching on raising children. I would drive down in South America, driving down the road, listening to Bob. Technology is an awesome thing, isn't it? I used to drive down and listen to that. I appreciate this church very much and what it stands for.

Just recently, probably five or six months ago, my family and I moved down to Atlanta, Georgia. We were actually here in the States traveling, reporting back, and at the time we were here, we had a lot of different thoughts in our mind and a lot of different thinking. We began to pray about some specific things. The doors opened up, and we transitioned from being missionaries in Argentina, living in South America for the last 10 years. We just transitioned into a new responsibility. I am working as the director of a mission board in Atlanta. This is all brand new. I do not think they know what they are doing asking me to be in charge of something, but I will let them be blind for a little while anyway. We are enjoying ourselves.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to go to Africa. We have one of our guys that is there; he just started a church two months ago. We have got another guy on our way there in West Africa, and the Lord has been good to us. So my responsibility is to help these guys as they are on the road raising support and help them get ready. We have got a training center actually to help people with culture adaptation, church planting, language learning, all these different things, and help our guys as they are there to go multi-church plants. So we are helping in that aspect. At the same time, I am traveling, recruiting, helping, encouraging, and different things. To be quite honest, a lot of people say, "So how exactly does this work out?" And I will say, "Well, give me a

little bit more time, and then I will tell you," because it is a lot of theory at the moment in my head. I am just learning all this stuff. But a lot of times, we miss our home, which was South America, and the things that we did and the hands-on type stuff. But we are learning a lot, and I am very thankful for it.

I. The Context Of Deuteronomy

The Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 28. Let me remind you of what is going on in the Book of Deuteronomy. The Book of Deuteronomy is also called the second law. It is the fifth book in the Bible, one of the last that Moses wrote before the Lord took him. Of course, he wrote some different Psalms and some other portions, but the Book of Deuteronomy was kind of the end of the historical books right before they go into the Promised Land. Everything that Deuteronomy is, it was just a repetition of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

In other words, they come out. They were in Genesis, the creation, we go into the fall, we know the flood, we know everything that happens there, that Joseph was sent into Egypt because of slavery. He is taken out of Egypt, across the Red Sea. They are going through, and they are walking around the desert. We know all about the story, but as they are in the desert, one day the Lord has great plans for them. They are going to go into the Promised Land. Because of their disobedience, they spend 40 years going in a bunch of circles, and we know what goes on. So during these 40 years, Moses begins to tell them, "Now when you get there, this is what you should do. Now when you get there, this is how you should live." He tells them all these things that they have to know that God wants for His children, especially the children of Israel.

Now finally, he comes to the end, and this book is not a long period of time; it is actually around 30 days, it is one month long. In other words, right when they come to the Jordan River, he has got one month before they cross over. So Moses looks back and he says, "I need to remind you of everything I told you in the last many years." To be quite honest, many times we as Christians, we want to hear something new and get something fancy and wonderful, and the honest truth is sometimes we just need to repeat the basic things and make sure we are putting those in practice in our life. So he repeats this once again, and he says, "Now let me tell you." He goes through all these laws that God has for them.

We come to chapter 28. In the very first 14 verses, he begins to talk about blessings, and he says, "Now God is going to bless you," speaking to the children of Israel. I realize in the context we are talking to the children of Israel, not necessarily to the church, but we have an application we could pull out of here. He begins to say, "Now God will bless you if you do this, and God will bless you if you do this, and God will bless you." All of a sudden, in verse 15, he flips the coin, and he begins to say, "But if you do not obey God, there are some consequences that come with it." Allow me to say, they never lost the privilege of being God's chosen people, and you will not lose your salvation, and you will not lose the love that God has for you, but when we get away from God, many times we suffer consequences because of our own sin.

So God begins to warn them through Moses, and he says, "This will happen to you, this will happen to you." When we come down to verse 47, I want to show you something that is very

unique. He says something when he is talking about these consequences, and I want you to see it because many times we do not even think of this.

Deuteronomy 28:47-48

Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things;

Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.

Now think about this for one second. This does not sound like good news. Why in the world would I be reading this negative section here that the Lord said, "This is what I am going to do to you, and you are going to die of famine and of nakedness; I am going to put a yoke on you"? This sounds really rough. But I want you to see here, the whole section, the whole point here, is not that they are not serving God. The point and the whole act right here is that they are not serving God in a certain way. The Bible says, "Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness and gladness of heart."

II. Serving The Lord With Joy

I want to talk to you about this this morning just for a few moments: serving the Lord with joy. I do not doubt this church, and I pray this morning that I can be a blessing, that it would never in my mind and in my heart be my desire to be a discouragement or to be a hindrance or anything for the kindness that you all have shown to us. But I do want to say this morning, dear friends, many of us come to church, and many of us, maybe we read our Bible, or maybe we pray with our family, or we do all the things that we should be doing, and Christian life becomes a routine in our life, something we always do week after week, but there is really not a joy in our heart.

Have you ever come to church, and be honest with me just for a moment, have you ever come to church and you are standing there, and you are bodily present, but your mind is totally in another area, and you are thinking, "I wish he would hurry because the roast is about to burn"? You are thinking, "We are singing, he said, "This is a great verse. Let us sing it all out!" And you are just staring at the ceiling saying, "You know what?" You are thinking totally something else than what happened last night or whatever else it may be. You are there. It is not like you are not going to church, and it is not like you are not going through the routine. You are totally there. You are serving God. "Preacher, what in the world can you complain about? I give, and I go, and I love my family. What can you complain about?" And the Lord said, "That is not the problem."

God wants His children to serve Him, but He wants us to serve Him with joy. There are so many things in this life, dear friends, that steal our joy away from us. There are so many things that rob our joy in this world that we live in. So this morning, I want to speak to you about this just for a few moments: serving the Lord with joy. But in order to serve the Lord with joy, I want to show you a couple of principles out of the Word of God.

As we make our way to the Book of Genesis, chapter 41, I want to show you something in Genesis chapter 41. I want to show you that if we are going to serve the Lord with joy, there are some specific things we need to take into account in our own lives. There are some steps maybe we need to think about. If you want to get a pen, you want to underline a few different things or think about a few different things, I can tell you that maybe today you are totally fine, dear friend. Maybe you say, "I am wonderful, I am doing good, this is for somebody else," and whatever it may be. But let me tell you that maybe tomorrow or maybe the next day or maybe very soon something might happen to you. You might need just exactly what we are speaking about. So how can we serve the Lord with joy?

III. Principle 1: Forget The Past

As we make our way to Genesis chapter 41, for the sake of time, from Genesis chapter 37 all the way to the end of Genesis, chapter 50, we see the life of Joseph, a wonderful life, a wonderful example. We see the life of Joseph, but right here where we are going to be speaking, you know kind of the background of what is going on here. Joseph was one of the 12, right? At the time, he was the 11th son of Jacob, and he was the one there in the house, and he was kind of the favored one. In fact, Jacob gave his son a coat of many colors, and his brothers hated him.

One day, you know the story, and just to run through it very quickly, one day Joseph's dad says, "Now Joseph, I want you to go over there, and I want you to see how your brothers are doing." So he goes over there, and he is taking the sandwiches, "Hey guys, what is going on?" All of a sudden, they see him coming. "Here is that coat that Daddy bought for him. Oh man, are we going to get him? I got an idea." The brothers begin to talk. There are 10 of them. They begin to talk, and they say, "The staff, I am going to beat the slop out of him with my staff." "No, no, no, I got a better idea. Let us kill him." "What? I mean, really, I am sick of this. He is always having these crazy dreams. He thinks he is better than us. Dad, I mean, we can do it. Let us get rid of him." All of a sudden, his brothers say, "I got a better idea. Let us just put him in this hole right here, and then later we can pull him out." You know the story, how it goes along.

All of a sudden, these Ishmaelites come by, and they said, "I got a better idea. If we kill him, what do we have to gain here? I have got a better idea. Let us sell him, and they will take him, and they will give us some money for it. We get rid of our brother. We get money. Hey man, what a good life we will have." And they say, "Okay, let us do it." So they sell him to the Ishmaelites. They give them the money. They go on. They go home, and they rip the jacket, and they put some blood on it from one of the lambs. They say, "Daddy, is this your son's coat?" And his daddy thinks his son is dead. And they are all happy. They have got their money. They made it. They got rid of their problem. Everything is good.

Now, the story kind of turns, and it takes it off the eyes of the brothers, and the Bible takes it to the eyes of Joseph. Now Joseph is in Egypt. He gets to Egypt, and all of a sudden, he is serving there in Egypt, and he was a slave, and he was taken from this position. He was put up a little bit higher and a little bit higher. You know the story, how he goes from rank to rank, and all of a sudden, God begins to bless him, and God begins to use him in a wonderful way. At this time in

Genesis 41, he is now married. He is now serving in the position that God has placed him in. I want you to see this.

Genesis 41:51-52

And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.

And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

I want you to take note there; there is something super interesting to me there. He has two children. The children, even as Bob was saying, "This is what my name means." I have no idea if that is what Bob's name means because he was saying peace and war all in the same sense. Bob, I have no, I mean, I think you were making things up as you come along. But it sounded great, right? In Bible times, the names really meant something. I always tell my wife, "This is what my name means," and she never believes it. But anyway, I make up some really cool stuff. In Bible times, they had names, and they meant something.

Well, sure enough, he says, "My firstborn Manasseh." What in the world is that supposed to mean? Well, that means forget. I forget all the past. Forget what? Why in the world would you want to forget your dad's house, and why in the world would you want to forget that? It is not that he necessarily wanted to forget all the time that he had with mom and dad and all the good time. It is not that he was wanting to forget that. But every time he thought about, "Yeah, I remember when I was back home, I remember how they hated me. I remember what they did to me." Every time he had that thought, a bitter problem and a bitter thought came up in his mind, and he just got frustrated, and he just got mad.

So he has a second child, and he names this child Ephraim, which means to be fruitful. Now let me ask you a question real quick. How many of you all would like to be fruitful, would like God's blessing on your life? Man, I would. Would it not be wonderful if I could give a plan from the Scripture and say, "God will bless you in all these ways"? It is not exactly like that. But Joseph says, "Hey, God has let us be fruitful." But listen, before you can be fruitful, you first have to forget some certain things.

The very first step and the very first principle that you and I must realize if we want to serve the Lord with joy in our heart:

1. We need to learn to forget the past.

Now, what in the world is the past? When I used to stand in Argentina in front of the churches and I would preach to them, I would look at people who had been abused when they were children. People who, because of parents being in a divorce, they never got over it, or they have been in a divorce themselves, they never got over it, or because people have said hurtful things, or they stole money from them, or they hurt them, or whatever may happen. They have got real, real, real good reasons to be upset. Listen, every time they come to church, we talk about, and

they want to go forward, but they can never go forward in their lives. Do you know why? Because they will never let go of what happened to them in the past.

I guarantee if I asked you this morning, all of us have negative stories. All of us can say, "Yeah, I remember when he did that to me. Oh, yeah, I remember." Years ago, I was in Argentina, and I remember somebody had hurt me. I remember I was looking, and my pastor had come over, and he was visiting in Argentina, and somebody had hurt me, and all of a sudden, we get online, and on Facebook of all places, this person that hurt me published something and said something. And I said, "Look at what he did to me!" Man, I was mad. So my pastor looks at me and says, "What are you going to do about it?" I said, "I will tell you what I am going to do about it. I am going to write them back, and I am going to tell them this so everybody can know. And man, I am going to call him, and I am going to tell him." Then I was thinking, "Maybe the Lord will arrange it so we get in the back alley, and I could accidentally hit him, accidentally. And then I can run away, and he will never know what had really happened." I mean, man, I was waiting for the day. I was so mad. It was consuming me.

He said, "What are you going to do about it?" And I said, "I will tell you what I am going to do about it." He looked at me and said, "When was the last time you prayed for him?" I thought, "What did you just say? I know you are my pastor, but what did you just say?" He said, "When was the last time you prayed about it?" I thought, "You did not hear my story right." So, man, I went over it again. "Do you know what? I helped this man, and I love this man, and look what he did to me, and he published it so everybody can see." Man, I went over my story again. I thought, "For sure this time he is going to hear it right." He looked at me and said, "Well, you need to be praying for him." I thought, "This is the last time I am inviting you to Argentina, big boy. I mean, I invited you. You are in my territory. What are you talking about? You are supposed to say, 'Well, let us get the bats. We will go get them together.'" This is my pastor; he is supposed to help me.

All of a sudden, I began to think about that, and I began to pray for the person. When I prayed for the person, I thought, "Lord, please help. Oh, I hate him." You can look at me like you are all so pretty and perfect, but we all know what I am talking about. Man, I would think, and believe it or not, I could finally begin to even think and say his name without feeling bad. I mean, I could not even think of the guy without having bad, mean thoughts. The honest truth is, all of us have been hurt in some way in our lives. But until we realize there is a Bible principle of "let us let go and forget the past," just let it in God's hand, we will never be able to serve the Lord with joy in our hearts. So many times, we sing and we say, "Holy, holy, holy," and inside, buddy, it grips us, and it pulls us back. We come to church, and we listen to preaching, and we read our Bible, and we do all we can, and we are going through the routine, but inside, it is ripping us back.

We have a saying in Spanish in Argentina, and it says, "You cannot avoid the bird flying over your head, but you cannot avoid the bird making a nest over your head." The application would be, problems are going to fly right by you, but you do not have to let them sit right on top of you and dwell on them and dwell on them and dwell on them because it will get in your heart, and it will get in your mind, and it will mess you up, and it will kill you. Every time you want to serve

God, and every time you want to go forward, it is like the devil saying, "Hey, don't forget that. You remember what happened to you." "You are right, man, you are right."

I was reading a book a while back, and the book said this: "Our problems are like sores." When you get a cut or you get a sore on your arm, just a little while passes, and all of a sudden, it begins to get a scar there, or better said, it begins to heal over a little bit, and you get a scab. It says that if you just leave it alone, that scab will finally heal over, and it will be okay. But if you keep itching it, the scab will keep coming off, and you will keep bleeding. It will never get better. When something happens to you in life, if you keep going back and scratching it, you will never forget it, and it will keep coming back. But if you will just leave it alone, it finally will get over.

Dear friends, you have all the right in the world to say, "He did this to me. I cannot believe, man, that is wrong. Do you not realize?" And I would look at you and I would say, "You are sure right. I cannot believe they talked to you like that. I cannot believe they hurt you like that." But so many people run their lives because they cannot get over things that have happened in their lives. Especially if you are going to serve the Lord with joy, you need to learn to forget the past.

Take God's Word and if you would, go with me to the Book of Philippians, chapter 4. Someone said this a long time ago: "We are never more like Christ than at the moment we forgive and reconcile with another person." It is really hard to forgive somebody. If anybody had a right, it was Joseph. If anybody had a right to be a little bit perturbed, it was Joseph. Not only was he disliked, he was sold into slavery. They wanted to kill him. They did not just say, "We are not talking to you anymore, big boy." They wanted to kill him, and they sold him into slavery. His life should have gone bad, but God began to use him because he put it all in the past. At the end, in Genesis chapter 50, when his dad dies, and his brothers come back, and they say, "Oh, Daddy, he had one last request. Please, please be nice to us. Forgive us." And he looked and he said, "You all probably thought you meant this for bad, but God actually meant it for good."

So many times in Psalms 119:67 and 119:70, David the Psalmist, he looks back and he says, "If I was not, if I would not have been afflicted, I probably would not be in the right path." In other words, he said, "God used these things maybe to open my eyes, and God used these things to put me back on path." Although I could have got my eyes off, and I could have been looking, man, I could have been mad and all these different things. God used those to put me back in line. Listen, friend, it is not my responsibility to get the revenge with somebody and to make sure somebody does it. So many times we look and we say, "Lord, I am praying for that person. Would you please bless him, Lord? But if he gets in a car accident, I totally understand, Lord. Only if it is your will, Lord. Let him live because please do not kill him, Lord. But let him be so sick he is in the hospital because I want to visit him and remind him that I still love him." Good night, we cannot get over things.

Listen, friend, can I tell you where one of the biggest problems are many times? Listen, in our own churches. Somebody has hurt us. Somebody has offended us. Pastor said something. "I know he meant that for me. Did you see when I walked in the church? I said, 'Hello,' they did not even look at me. I cannot believe the gall that they have for crying out loud." We get so mad. Listen, you think, "Oh, that is so silly." Well, then why many times do we walk out and we say,

"Oh, forget it." And you know who the one, it is not like the Lord saying, "Good decision, son." You know who it is? The devil saying, "Got that one out. He will not be serving the Lord anymore." You and I need to serve the Lord, but not just serve the Lord, we need to serve Him with joy. But we have got to realize, unless we can forget the past, we will never be able to be fruitful and go forward.

IV. Principle 2: Accept The Present

I want you to see here in Philippians chapter 4. Look at Philippians chapter 4, verse 11.

Philippians 4:11

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

He says, "Whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Paul simply accepts it. The context of the passage right here tells us that Paul said, "I have lived with abundance. Man, was it good! And I have lived with nothing, and it is okay too. I made it through both." If you would ask me, I would prefer to be on this side of the spectrum. He said, "But I have learned one thing: wherever God puts me, in whatever position and whatever place, I have learned to be content."

Now follow with me. If you are going to serve the Lord with joy:

2. You have to learn to forget the past.
3. You have to learn to accept the present.

What is that supposed to mean? Paul said, "Economically or positionally or physically or whatever it may be, man, I would much rather be like I used to have it." He said, "But I have got to accept where God has put me right now." Paul could have looked back and he said, "Man, I had the training, buddy. I mean, I had it all. I could be making the money. I could be doing it. Look at man, I have got it all." But this is where God now. Listen, many times you and I are living thinking, "God, I will be happy if You only give me a pay raise, Lord. And Lord, man, will I be happy when we can only get out of this house and be put in this house? Then I, Lord, I will be satisfied. I will go back to serving You like before, and I will be on fire for You, Lord. But I need You to fix this little problem that I have." And the Lord says, "I might fix that problem. I might not fix that problem. But either way, I want you to be happy right where you are at." Until you can learn to accept the present, dear friend, without living in this dream world of "if I can only have" or "when I do" or "what if" and all these questionable things, until we can learn to accept that, we will never be able to serve the Lord with joy. It will steal it right from us.

In Hebrews 13:5, he says that He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. Right before He gives us that great promise, He says, "Therewith we are to be content, knowing that He never will leave us nor forsake us." In other words, if we go over to 1 Timothy chapter 6, Paul says in verse 6 and verse 7, "Of all these things, the basic need," and he begins to say, "Just be content with what you have in the food and the raiment, just the basic food." Well, it would be nice if we had steak every day. How many of you all like steak? I mean, I think I can be content if I did not have a good job, but I had steak every day, right? That would not be too bad. But lentils every

day for crying out loud! I mean, come on, Lord, could You not give me something else? Lentils for crying out loud every day? I am getting a little bit sick of this. He said, "No, no, no, just with the basic food." What about the clothing? Well, if it is a certain name brand or something, he said, "No, just really basic things."

I was just in West Africa. It is interesting because in many of those areas, they wear the same clothes over and over and over and over. I am not saying anything, but some ladies change like four times a day for crying out loud. Before we go to church, my wife will say, "What do you think about it?" "It looks great." Next thing I know, five minutes later, she comes out with, I said, "Look, five before." And she comes out with different outfits. They will come in, and the people say, "Well, listen to this. This is the crazy thing. Do you know what they will say many times in Africa? 'Why do you need two pair of shoes?'" "Well, one to play, and one to go to church, and one for dress." I mean, come on. What do you mean, two pair of shoes? I cannot play basketball on these. But the thing is, it is not the point of what you have. This is the point: until we can learn, as Paul said, just the basic things, just be happy with where we are at. God blesses us, amen. And if God leaves us where we are at, amen. It is all okay, but we need to learn to be happy where God has placed us.

"If I had a better position at work, man, then I would be." God says, "No, no, no, no, who gave you that position?" "Well, I know. But if it was a better salary, I could give a lot more." And the Lord said, "Well, I am not asking you to give what you would have. I am asking you to give from what you do have." "Well, I know. But if I had this better car, man? Do you know how much I would go visit all the people that have not been coming to church lately?" And the Lord said, "Well, what is the matter with going and visiting with what you do have?"

I remember when I was probably 15 years old, and man, I wanted a car so bad. I began to think, and this is my immaturity, my ignorance. I used to really pray, "God, if You give me a car, I am going to go pass out tracts with that car. But, Lord, I need You to give me a car, Lord." Man, I used to make up all these things, thinking that I was going to con the Lord into giving me something, right? "Lord, You will buy what I am getting ready to say to You, right?" The Lord is trying to teach us, "Hey, I might give you a car, but I still want you to serve Me where you are at now." If we cannot learn to accept what God has given us and where God has placed us, with what and with whom God has placed us, we will never be content. If we cannot accept it, it will steal our joy right away from us, dear friends.

Make your way to the Book of Colossians, chapter 3. As we make our way over, we see the same man, Paul. Under the inspiration of God, he is going to say something that is super interesting and important, and it will bring us into our next section. But I want to show you this. Do you remember Paul? He had this thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Many commentaries, many people believe that maybe it was his eyes. He could not see very well, and that is why sometimes he would say in the Scripture, "I need big letters." He said multiple things. We have no idea. Whatever it was, he did have some problem, some thorn in the flesh. Was it a sickness, or was it a problem? I have no idea what it was, but I do know he had some thorn in the flesh, at least something he wanted to get rid of, some problem he wanted to get rid of.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, he said, "Now, Lord, I need You to take care of this, God, because if it was his eyes, then I could see better, and I could read more, and I can do more, Lord, and I could walk farther and everything else." And the Lord said, "It is all right." "I do not think You heard me the first time, Lord. I am Your servant, I love You. I am Your child, and I know You want the best for me because Joel Osteen said the best for today. I mean, I know You want the best. I mean, come on, Lord, You have got it. So what I am asking You is not a big thing." "So it is going to be a second time. I am not going to keep repeating that. Now, Lord, I need You to get rid of this problem for me because You know I love You." "And I do not remember how Elisha died of sickness and how John the Baptist. And I am not going to think about those. Lord, You have to take care of this problem for me." And the Lord said, "It is all right." "I do not think You heard me. I am going to open the window. I am going to even go outside. I am going to let you know I am going to climb the tree. I am going to talk a little bit louder because maybe You did not hear me real, real well, okay?"

"So I am going to climb. Lord, last time, I just need to let You know I have got a problem. I do want to serve You, Lord. And I am traveling around trying to serve You. So what I need from You, not a big deal. I need You to take this away from me because You know I love You. You know I am serving You. You know I am doing this." And the Lord said, "Nope. My grace is sufficient for you." On the third time, he just stops all of a sudden. He does not say anything else. We do not see it written anymore in Scripture. It was just like he accepted what God had put him and given him right there in the present. And he said, "All right, I guess I have got to go forward."

Now listen to me. Sometimes we have problems in our lives and in our families and in our jobs and economically in every imaginable way possible. We are praying earnestly that God will give us and help us, and keep praying. God may allow us to get out and whatever else. But listen, at the same time, we are praying that God will save us from. We need to realize if He does not, as Daniel chapter 3 said, "If God does not save us, we still will be faithful and serve Him." Dear friends, listen, there are things that will steal our joy. We have to realize:

4. We have to forget the past.

Do not let those things roll over your head and stay there. It will make you bitter. It will hurt you more than it will hurt anybody else. I heard a saying somebody said, "When you are bitter at somebody, it is like, say my brother, I sound bitter, and man, I am mad at him. So I look at him, and I grab a can of like, some venomous, bug killer or something. And I get this can of Raid, and I come off the top, and I look at him and say, 'Man, I do not like him. I hope he dies,' and I drink it. I drink this poison. Do you think I am going to die or he is going to die? You tell me. This really is not a trick question, honestly. I mean, somehow I did not go to college for that. This is not a trick question, guys. Honestly, if I drink the poison, hoping that he dies, who is going to die, me or him?" Obviously. Listen, so many times we look, and we get so mad, and we hate so much, and we wish so bad upon, and we are eating it in this bitterness. It is eating us up, and it will take us down physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

If we are going to serve the Lord with joy:

5. We need to learn to forget the past.
6. We need to learn to accept the present.

Where God has placed us, with what God has placed us, with whom God has placed us, in the time God has placed us now.

V. Principle 3: Focus On The Future

I want you to see Colossians chapter 3. Look what it says in verse 1.

Colossians 3:1-2

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

Now, what is that supposed to mean? "The things on the earth." What things are on the earth? Problems, struggles, hard times, difficulties, people problems, everything else, right? If we begin to look at the problems, man, we will get awful discouraged. We will get awful down. We will quit on God. We will not want to do any more. And we will look at it. But listen, instead of looking at the problems, if we begin to look at the power of our God, we can get out of the problem and continue going forward.

So follow with me. If we are going to serve the Lord with joy:

7. We need to learn to forget the past.
8. We need to learn to accept the present.
9. We need to learn to focus on the future.

You see, he said, "Do not look right here on the earth," because man, there are all kinds of things going wrong, and the devil is destroying, and problems are happening, and you will get discouraged, and you will want to quit. And you will say, "I forget that church stuff, man. I quit that, and forget that. Everybody else is living like that. I just want to be like everybody else." If we look at the earth, and we look right where we are at, and we look all around us, man, we will get faint-hearted. We will want to quit. But listen, if we begin to think about the future, what God has for us, we will say, "These things are not so big anymore. I am just going to focus on my Lord." We begin to look at Him and think about Him and what He has for us.

You see, our real rewards, dear friends, praise the Lord for good friends and praise the Lord for blessings. Maybe it would be economically or in the family or with your job or in the area or whatever it may be. If God blesses you, man, that is great. That is wonderful. But listen, your real reward is not your new house and your new car and all the things, even your family and all the things that you have around you. Your real reward and your focus should be set up on high. Because if you do not look forward, you are going to get faint-hearted. You are going to start worrying. You are going to get stressed, and you are not going to be able to do it. So you must focus on the future. You must look at what God has for you.

In fact, in the Book of Joshua, I believe it is chapter 13, where he begins to speak to Joshua, and the Lord begins to tell him, "Now, tell the Levites, they are not going to have any land of position like the other tribes that are there. Really, My reward, their reward is Me." I am sure they are looking and thinking, "Everybody has got their own. I am getting gypped. Your blessing, your reward is the Lord. Come on, I am getting gypped here, man. Look at what you got. Look what I got." And many times we are looking around.

I know a man that is going to our church that he is from India. He came over to the United States. We just had a men's meeting on January 25th. We had just arrived back to Africa, and I did not make the men's meeting. It was at our church, and supposedly this man in the men's meeting, he got up. There are a couple of different churches involved. It was at our church, and this man got up, and he said, "I realize," listen to this, a man from India, he comes from all this poverty and comes from all these problems, and he looks at the people and he says, "I have realized," he told the man that for years now, "I have been chasing after and fighting for the American dream, and it has stolen me away from God."

Can I tell you these material things around us? There is nothing wrong with having things, and praise the Lord for what God has given you. But when you begin to look around and think of all these things, it pulls your eyes from there, and you begin to look around here, and it will destroy you. So many times in Argentina, the people in church, and they say, "This thing in church, it is just not so spiritual like I thought it was. I just thought." And I thought, "Your preacher is not an angel, and you are not an angel for crying out loud. Please let somebody help him look in the mirror." None of these things are. We are living here upon this earth. You have to walk with your feet upon the earth, but your eyes must be placed in heaven because if you look around, you might get deceived, and you might get tricked. You might think this is all crazy. But your reward is not here. You have got to focus up there.

There is a song that I used to like to sing. It is actually in Spanish, and I learned this song, and I love this song. You might know it; it is probably just a chorus that says, "I will serve Thee because I love Thee. You have given life to me. I was nothing, and then You found me. You have given life to me." The Lord is not after your wallet, dear friend. I used to tell the people in Argentina, they would come, and I would stand up, and I would say, "Now, if you are here visiting, we are not asking you to give. Hey, church people, we are not asking you to give. God does not need your money." Do you know how many people are so happy when I said that? And I thought, "This is the church that God has put me in. I am fool-free from here." God does not need your wallet, and He does not. God wants your heart. The amazing thing is there is a nerve that runs straight from the heart to the wallet. Is not that crazy? But the honest truth is so many times we think about all these things. Listen, and it steals us, and it robs us right away.

VI. Conclusion: Serving Out Of Love, Not Duty

What I am asking you this morning is God does not need your abilities. "Oh, I cannot get by if you are not with me and all my team." God does not need your abilities, and God does not need your money, and God does not need you per se. But God gives you the privilege to serve Him. God let you do that. So I am asking you this morning to pull your passion away from things and

put it upon the Lord, to pull your love from things and put it on the Lord, to pull your emphasis of things and put it on the Lord, and start serving the Lord. Keep giving. Keep coming to church. Keep discipling, and keep praying, and keep all what you are doing. It is awesome. It is good. Keep it up. But I am saying as you do it, do it with joy in your heart, not out of duty because "this is what I have to do."

Imagine I go home now, and I see my wife here in a couple of days, fly back to Atlanta, and I will see my wife, and my wife says, "How is it going, baby?" I say, "Good, man. I missed you." She comes up to you. "I will see you later." "For crying out loud, what was that for?" I said, "Baby, give me a kiss, but I mean a kiss, do not just, I am just fulfilling my duty. Take that one." I mean, come on, give me a kiss, but give me a real kiss. I mean, I missed you, baby. Listen, we would say, "I am glad she gave me a kiss, but come on, out of duty? That is crazy." So many times like, "Lord, here is 10 bucks. Hope You are happy, huh?" "Oh, I would never say that." It is almost like we act like that. And the reason is not because you do not want to. The reason is because your past is so absorbing you, and the present situation, you just cannot get over it, and your focus is right here. So we cannot really move forward.

So I ask you to think about this this morning. One simple thing: we serve Him with joy. I will serve Him because I love Him, not because I have to. My dad had this weird saying when I was a kid. He used to aggravate the fire out of me. My dad would say, "Let us go," and I said, "Dad, do we have to go to church?" And he said, "No." I said, "Yeah, baby." And he would say, "No, we do not have to go. We get to go." So yeah, it makes me mad. And I would say, "Well, Dad, I mean, are we going to do something today? You do not have to work, dude." He said, "I do not have to, son." "So yeah." He said, "But I get to." I mean, "Quit that stuff." "Dad, do I have to do my chores?" "No, you do not have to." "All right." He is what you get to us and quit that. It is almost like you looked at the Lord and you say, "Lord, do I have to serve You?" And He said, "No, you really do not have to. But it is a great privilege. And if you are going to serve Me, I do not want you to do it because you think you have to. I want you to come to church, and I want you to sing, and I want you to give, and I want you to love, and I want you to disciple, and I want you to invite, and I want you to pray, and I want you to read, and I want you to do all this not because you have to, but because you love Me. Do it out of love and joy, not out of duty."

Father, I pray and I ask God that You bless these sweet people. Lord, thank You for them. Thank You for Bob. Thank You for this church. Lord, I ask that You would please, Lord, use us, all of us. Father, I pray that I did not overstep my bounds, and Father, I pray that I did not do anything that I would hinder, God. Maybe that I would rather be a blessing, Lord, and I love these people. I love this church, and Lord, they have been such an example for me and to me, and Lord, I pray with all my heart that all of us would realize it is good. We need to serve You. We need to go through the routine, but may we not go through a routine out of duty. May we do it out of love. May we serve You. May we put You first in everything, Lord. We need You, and we thank You, God. Thank You so much. Teach us and use us in Jesus' name. Amen.