

Deuteronomy 20

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[0 : 0 0] book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy chapter 20. Deuteronomy chapter 20 is where we are at this evening, just continuing to make our way through this great book of the Old Testament, the book of Deuteronomy, and continuing to just look at these great truths, really in the application, excuse me, dealing with everyday life and dealing with God's impact, I guess you could say, upon the life of his people, upon their community life, upon their worship life, upon their legal life, their legalistic structure, and then we'll get into something this evening that is really kind of unique, especially to this time period, something we don't see it as much today, well we don't see it as much, we are not actively involved in these things today, and it is going out and fighting our enemies, right, fighting a battle physically, literally, and their warfare, but we'll hopefully see the application as it pertains to us, because we do fight spiritual battles, each and every one of us, so we'll hope to see that application there from Deuteronomy chapter 20. Before we get into the text, let's pray together, and then we'll read the text with one another, so let's pray.

Lord, we thank you so much just for allowing us together here. We thank you for the great privilege of looking at your word. We thank you for the great benefit which we gain from it, and Lord, we pray as we read it that through your presence we would come to a better understanding of it, that the understanding would be lived out through application, and that application would draw us closer to you. Lord, we pray that through the truths of it our lives would be transformed, that we would become more and more conformed to what you've called us to be as your people, and how you've called us to live in this world you've placed us in, and Lord, we thank you for that. We pray that you would be glorified through the things that take place, and you'd be glorified through all that is said, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Deuteronomy chapter 20, we're going to look at it in its entirety. It's only 20 verses, and then we will flesh it out together.

When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them. For the Lord your God who brought you up from the land of Egypt is with you. When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people.

He shall say to them, Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be faint-hearted. Do not be afraid or panic or tremble before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to save you. The officers also shall speak to the people, saying, Who is the man that has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle, and another man would dedicate it. Who is the man that has planted a vineyard and has not begun to use its fruit? Let him depart and return to his house, and otherwise he might die in the battle, and another man would begin to use its fruit. And who is the man that is engaged to a woman and has not married her? Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle, and another man would marry her. Then the officers shall speak further to the people and say, Who is the man that is afraid and faint-hearted? Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brother's hearts melt like his heart. When the officers have finished speaking to the people, they shall appoint commanders of armies at the head of the people. When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you. However, if it does not make peace with you but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. When the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword, only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil.

You shall take his booty for yourself, and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the Lord your God has given you. Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not the cities of these nations nearby. Only in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God has given you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, and all the Lord your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the Lord your God.

[4 : 36] When you besiege a city a long time to make war against in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field of man that it should be besieged by you? Only the trees which you know are not fruit trees you shall destroy and cut down, that you may construct siege works against the city that is making war with you until it falls. Deuteronomy chapter 20. Some of you are going, and now what? Because I dare say that we will not make preparations this evening, or at least we should not make preparations this evening together together, and to go attack our enemies and to wage war. Yet if we put ourselves in the nation of Israel's time, and we understand that the nation of Israel is about to go inhabit the promised land, and in the promised land they will be in a very vulnerable condition. They will be hemmed in on one side by the Mediterranean Sea. No natural sea coast on the Mediterranean Sea, just a bit of historical information. Herod the Great developed underwater concrete and built the first sea post in Jewish territory in Caesarea Philippi, or in not

Caesarea Philippi, in Caesarea Philippi, the development of underwater concrete, and he built these piers going out so that ships could come in, but prior to that no natural sea coast. So they're hemmed in on one side by the Mediterranean Sea, the other side of the Transjordan area. There's this great vast desert, often referred to as the wilderness, and yet they live smack dab in the middle of the trade route when people are going from Egypt and trying to go across even into the Babylonian region, going to Babylon. They would go through that area, made themselves very vulnerable. God put his people right in the middle of all commerce and all trade and all routes. There was a road called the King's Highway that would take you through that area, so that this is pre-Roman time, right? This is a very popular time, a very desirable place. We see even when Alexander the Great conquers this land, that at his sudden death, it was divided up among his four generals. This is prophesied in the book of

Daniel, and even in the book of Ezekiel for us. And we see that these things are desirable. This land is desirable, and God dealing with man in his nature understands that his people will be people of war, that his people are going to be people of battle. And though he is not calling them to be soldiers, he is preparing them for the reality. He is preparing them for what is going to come about, and he is preparing them for what is going to transpire. And yet we see in Deuteronomy chapter 20, the battle plan for God's people. It is the battle plan for God's people physically, historically, though we are not 100% certain that they did this exactly like God called them to do, this is the battle plan he has laid for his people. As they inhabit the land, and as they seek to maintain the land from outside threats and invaders, and there are a lot of city-states and a lot of local governments and a lot of raiding parties, how they would protect themselves and secure their borders. This is God's battle plan for them historically, but it is also applicably his battle plan for us today as we wage war, not with flesh and blood, but against the powers and principalities of the air and the spiritual forces of darkness.

Because God has always called his people to be a battling people, to be those who are securing the borders and ensuring that the enemy does not gain a foothold, and to ensure that the enemy has no way inwards, but is constantly pushing out. Because you remember, God has supposed that his people will expand their lands. They never occupy or own all that God promises them in the promised land.

They come close during the reign of David and close during some of that great Davidic dynasty, but very quickly breaks up and it goes away. But even then, David didn't, he occupied it, they paid him royalties, but it wasn't Israel's land. But what we see here is that God expects his people to push out, to move forward. Much like Matthew 18, where the church is seen as one moving forward, one that is on the offensive. Notice in each of these, they go to the city.

[9 : 26] They're on the offensive. They don't wait on the city to come to them. They go to the city. And we see in this battle plan how God encourages his people with the reality, just as it opens up, that when they go to battle, they will often be outnumbered, outmanned, and out-advanced.

They'll see armies larger than them. They'll see horses and chariots. They'll see all matters of warfare and instruments of warfare that they do not possess. But yet God still calls his people to be in the fight.

The application to that is pretty easy. As individuals, we want to make this application and we need to understand it well. Our enemy is an enemy with more tools than us, more resources than us, and in this world, more power than us.

But yet, greater is he that is in us than he who is against us. Satan has more resources than you do. He knows scripture very well.

He knows the time is limited. He has been in the presence of God, and we have not. The book of Job says he goes back and forth from the presence of God.

[10 : 47] He is referred to as one of the sons of God. He is an angel of light and beauty and one of the pinnacle of God's creation. Not the pinnacle, but one of the pinnacles of God's creation.

He has all kind of instrumentality at his disposal, and he uses them in various manners in the defensive and offensive battle. And he has a third of the host of heaven, this demonic influence.

Remember, the man with a legion of demons and they went to the pigs? That's kind of counted as kind of a small number, right? This man inside of him had 2,000 demons battling him.

He was outnumbered, outmanned, out-advanced. But greater is he that contacted him than he that was against him. And we see this battle plan that God gives his people that when they're going to go to fight a battle, from the outset, looking on, it's going to look hopeless and helpless, and it's going to look like there's no way, but God encourages them.

And there are some truths that he gives them. And the first one is he declares to them their comfort in that battle. That they can move forward in comfort and move forward understanding that though things seem bleak, though they seem very dark and though they seem helpless, he tells them, do not be afraid of them.

[12 : 17] Do not be afraid of them. Now, I like this passage, how this passage does not define them. This is not the Canaanite, the Jebusite, the Hivites. We'll get to those in just a minute.

We'll get to them in just a minute, the ites. But this is just the enemy in general, right? Whoever it is, whoever it may be, do not be afraid of them.

Whoever it is, how big their army may be, how advanced their technology appears, how much superior they are at fighting, how much further along in military warfare and understanding of it than they are than you, do not be afraid of them for the Lord your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, is with you.

See, comfort is found not in personal ability, and comfort is not found in either strength in number or strength in advancement. Comfort is found in the presence of the Lord our God.

Do not be afraid, for the Lord your God is with you. Comfort is found in He who is with us, not how many of us there are. We talked this morning about living missionally and pushing into the world wherever God has put us and placed us.

[13 : 37] The reality is, if we want to tie these two messages together, because as a pastor, I often struggle with this truth, the truth is this, we can only absorb so much, and even after absorbing so much, we can only apply so little.

So, I would dare say, and I don't mean this, this is humbling to me, come tomorrow afternoon, if I was to ask you what my four points of Sunday morning's message was, very few of us, without looking at our notes, would be able to spurt them off.

Now, that reminds pastors of their humanity, right? And then, if I was to come to you and say, okay, if I was to come to you tomorrow afternoon and say, can you tell me all eight points, because I have four tonight, all eight points from yesterday's messages, you would say, well, wow.

And the reason I know this, I used to play golf with my pastor on Monday afternoons, and I would go to work on Mondays, and I would meet him for nine holes of golf, and I was a new believer. And every Monday, I knew it was coming, and every Monday, he'd ask me, what did I preach on yesterday?

And every Monday, I had to say, it was, uh, mm. Well, it was the Bible. I know it was that. And then you're faced with that reality. Can you really apply all that you hear, or are you just oversaturating the sponge?

[14 : 58] But let's go back. We apply this even to what we saw this morning. Living missionally, we will often be outnumbered on the mission field, because there are many who walk in the broad path.

And we're called to walk among the many. And the fear factor is this, that there are a lot more not like me than there are like me, but the comfort is in this.

But yes, he is with me. What is that great confidence that we get into great commission? And lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the age.

I'm with you. I'm with you. Here we find comfort in the battle, because though things may seem to be against us, and though everything may seem to push back against us, and though from all points of view we seem to be outnumbered, it says, be comforted and do not fear, for the Lord your God is with you.

And then he reminds us, I like how Moses does this over and over again. Every time they're about to embark on something new, Moses looks back and reminds them of what they've seen in the past.

[16 : 08] It is the Lord your God who delivered you from Egypt. It is not just the Lord your God. It's not just Yahweh. It is the Yahweh who delivered you from Egypt.

Egypt was the most technologically advanced warriors of that day. Egypt was the one with the greatest strength and the greatest number. And Egypt was also the one at the bottom of the Red Sea. And what he's saying is, he who did it then can do it again.

So we find comfort in his presence. We find comfort in his possibilities. We find comfort in what he has done in the past. Listen, the reason God calls us to raise Ebenezer's and the reason God has done things in your life in the past is to embolden you in the present.

It is to remind you that the battle you're facing today is not bigger than the God who delivered you yesterday. It is to remind us that his presence was sufficient then and his presence is sufficient now.

And it is to comfort us. And the priests were to be there with them and the priests is to call their attention. It says the priest should stand up and say, Hear, O Israel, that is, pay attention to this.

[17 : 20] You are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be faint-hearted. Do not be afraid or panic or tremble before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to save you.

There is comfort in promise. There is comfort in his presence. There is comfort in what he has done in the past. And there is comfort in this promise. Even in the midst of the battle.

In God's battle plan for his people, he provides comfort. Here is comfort. It is his presence with us. Secondly, we see that God has called his people to a great commitment in the battle.

He has called those who are fighting to be committed to it. It is the commitment to the battle of his people. Because the leaders of the people are to stand up.

Not after the priests have made their declaration, then the officers shall also speak. And the officers are going to do something that we would never do. The officers are going to ask a series of questions.

[18 : 28] Who here has built a house and not dedicated it yet? You can go home. Who has planted a vineyard? And has not drunk of the fruit of their vineyard yet?

That is a five-year plan, by the way. First three years, you did not harvest the grapes. The fourth year, you gave them to the Lord. The fifth year, you finally got to do that. So who is less than five years into their vineyard?

You can go home. Who of you are engaged? And you have not been married yet? You can go home. See, what God is showing them is that there is the importance of this family life.

There is importance of the community life here. But God has also declared to them, we don't have to have everybody to win the battle. You just have to have me. Gideon would demonstrate this with his 300 men.

Too often, believers are desperate to find people to put in places rather than trusting that God's got it already under control. You don't have to make sure every hole is plugged.

[19 : 36] You just make sure that he who is supposed to be there is there. And that is the Lord, our God. So he gives them reason to go home. And really, the ultimate reason is this.

If there is any commitment to you that in your mind is greater than the battle you're about to face, go home. Because God is only going to fight with those who are genuinely committed.

If there is a distraction, if there is something more important back here, if there is something that is on your mind, or something that may pull you back, or something that may hold you away, or something that really is pulling you between the two, don't feel obligated to stay.

Go home. Because God wins with the committed. And God fights with the committed. Now Paul says, I speak, not the Lord, but it is my opinion.

It is better for a man not to be married. Now that's what Paul says. Now, we'll back that up. Many Bible scholars believe Paul was married at one time. And they believe that Paul's wife left him over his profession of faith in Christ.

[20 : 46] There's some scripture that references that. Most people believe that because just about every Pharisee would have been married historically. By the time Paul came to Christ at his age, just about every one of them would be.

But we do know when he writes scripture, he wasn't. We know that Peter was married, right? Because Paul says, do I not have a right to take on a wife like Cephas? Cephas is Peter. And also, Peter's mother-in-law was healed.

Last time I checked, you don't get a mother-in-law unless you're married. Who would want a mother-in-law unless you're married, right? I like my mother-in-law. He was at my house when I left today.

So that's fine. But we understand this reality here that Paul is saying, you know, you don't want anything to distract you.

You don't want anything to distract you. Some people say, oh, you're saying that I shouldn't be married. Well, let's kind of reel that in just a little bit. Paul lived with an preeminent coming of Christ.

[21 : 49] Like Paul literally thought Christ could come at any day. That's a good thing. That's a good way to live. Paul fully expected Christ to return in his day.

Now, the return of Christ is imminent. There's nothing that needs to take place before he comes back again historically. There's nothing. Okay?

And I think every one of us ought to live as if Christ could come back tomorrow. And I think there's some people God is empowered not to be married. And there are some people God has empowered to be married.

And it's not saying one way or another. It's not, and I love how Paul handles that. This is just me speaking. This is the Lord, but the Lord has also given wisdom. I give good advice, and I use that, and we can use that in our pre-marriage counseling or even our marriage counseling.

But we also need to fight this, that those committed to the battle win the battle. So if we're called to be married, then why don't we both be committed together?

[22 : 54] That's the unequally yoked principle, right? To be committed to fight the battle together. Because we see there's danger in not fighting a spiritual battle and filling a pool somewhere else.

So we see their commitment to the battle. God says, if there's anything in your life more important to you than this, then go. Spurgeon said it like this.

If you ever read Spurgeon's lectures to my students, it's very telling. Spurgeon would often have men come to him and want to enter the ministry, wanting to go into his pastor's school there so he could teach them.

I mean, who wouldn't want to sit at the feet of Charles Spurgeon, right? And learn from the prince of preachers. And people would come in there and want to sit down with him. And he'd always ask, well, why is God calling you?

Why do you think the Lord's calling you to be a preacher? And he said, inevitably people would say, well, I tried this and I failed and I tried this and I failed and I tried this and I failed. So God must be calling me to be a preacher. And Spurgeon said, well, so you're telling me you failed at everything you do.

[24 : 07] Why do you think you can't fail at being a preacher? He said, God doesn't call the failures, he calls the best. Kind of stepped on some toes, made a lot of people mad. He said, I'm more concerned about drawing those who succeeded everywhere else.

And he would tell them, if you can do anything else other than this, go do it. If you can. Even today, if someone talks to me about that and I always give the same advice to young preachers.

I have one who's reached out to me in the last couple of years and still reaching out to me. He's in Bible college now. And I gave him the same thing. If you can do anything else, go do it.

If the Lord will allow you to do anything else, go do it. Why? Because the battle's for the committed. It's not for the half devoted.

So whatever it is God is calling you to do, you feel like he's calling you to do. I'm not telling you to run away from it. Paul said, woe is me if I preach not the gospel.

[25 : 19] There's a fire in my bones. I have to preach the gospel. I would not be honest if as a pastor, I didn't tell you.

There are a lot of times that I would tell my wife and tell other people, if I can do anything else, I'm going to do it. Because it's not always easy.

But God won't let me do anything else. He says, no. No. Not going to happen. Because it's for the committed.

The battle's for the committed. Number three, we see their confidence. Not only their comfort and their commitment, but their confidence in the battle. Because then God takes it a step further and he asks the officers to ask one more question.

Who here is afraid or faint-hearted? Who is scared of the battle? And if you're scared, go home. We'll let you go home.

[26 : 24] Because, see, fear is not just contagious because he says, lest their fear spread to their fellow countrymen and cause them fear in their hearts as well because there is no place for fear on the front lines of the battle.

He says, we can't be around one another living in fear. But fear is sin. It is sin. He says, do not be afraid. And when the priest came, the priest said, do not fear or be faint-hearted.

And it is the sin of unbelief. And what he is doing is dismissing those who do not have faith that God can do what he said he's going to do.

Now God is absolutely honest. He said, lest some of you die. I almost like how that's dismissed. You don't go to battle or you may die. That doesn't mean you lose, by the way, if you're fighting the spiritual battle and you lose your life physically, that doesn't mean you lose.

It just means you move on to a greater victory. But what he is doing here is he's dismissing those who want to live in the open sin of rebellion against faith and trust in God.

[27 : 37] because God says what is needed is an absolute confidence in the promises of God. An absolute assertion that what God has said and what God has promised God will do.

It may come at a struggle. It may come at a cost. It may come at discomfort. It may come in an unlikely manner. We may only have to break the lanterns and give a cry and the people will run away.

We may have to dig trenches in the ground and let them fill up with water and the sun reflect over them and they think they see blood. We may have to go up on a hilltop alone and go into the camp by ourselves like Jonathan and his armor bearer.

But whatever God has called us to do we will do. And it is confidence. Because confidence is nothing other than absolute faith in what God has declared.

It is an absolute trust in the word of God and to live in fear and faint heartedness is to say I know what God has said but I don't think it will come about.

[28 : 50] I know what he has promised but I'm not sure he can deliver on those promises. The battle belongs to those who are confident and he has called his people to be confident in battle.

and he has called them to be confident in their trust and their faith and their surrender to him. Fourth and finally we see their comfort in battle their commitment to the battle their confidence in the battle.

Number four and this is really where it is telling their conduct during the battle. Their conduct during the battle.

Because God calls his people to fight differently than the other people of the world. In all things God has set his people apart. In all matters and in all ways and in all areas of their life God's people were set apart from everyone else.

And even in how they fought they are set apart. They are different. They are unique. They are a little bit strange. Now we need to understand that in this battle plan God sets a separation a distinction mark between those cities that are far off and those cities that are near.

[29 : 56] And reality is those cities that are near those cities. Canaanites, Jebusites, Hittites. He's called them to utterly destroy. Now we've come with a biblical understanding of that and we need to approach it with a biblical understanding of this.

This is a couple of things. First this is a reminder of the extreme cost of sin. Sin ultimately destroys us. Because they were going to die for the wages of their sin.

They lived in rebellion against God. They lived in rebellion to the standard of God. They disobeyed all these things and they would pay the consequences of their sin. Secondly, it reminds us of how easy it is to be carried away by the influence of others.

In the extreme measure God calls his people to live holy and separate. So they utterly destroy all those within the promised land. But it is their conduct on the battlefield outside that promised land away from them really that distinguishes them.

He says, when you approach a city offer it a term of peace. So the first thing we see is that as God fights the battles through his people he is not seeking to destroy people's lives but he is seeking to maintain the peace.

[31 : 16] Offered a term of peace. And if they accept it they are to be your indentured servants or slaves. If they fight against you then you are to kill every male and to spare the women and the children and the livestock and all the spoils and you are to use it.

Right? To be for your benefits. One thing I noticed in reading this text is that I think the word of God speaks very clearly and distinctly because it says the city which fights against you the city which fights against you or the city which battles against you.

While God's people are always moving forward taking the initiative they are not necessarily the initiators. They move forward to the city but they offer it terms of peace.

The city refuses the terms of peace and initiates the battle. God's people move forward with the initiative but the city initiates the battle. As the church moves forward into the edge of darkness we do not have to move forward angrily and with a bitter spirit seeking to slash and burn everywhere we go.

We move forward with initiative pushing back darkness but darkness will always initiate the battle with us because it does not like when we knock on its doorpost.

[32 : 38] The darkness does not like when the light begins to shine and it initiates the battle. But after the battle is initiated we are to trust and rely upon the Lord our God and we are to even fight differently and it's so much so that it says don't cut every tree down.

Right? It seems odd and out of place. One commentator says God went green way before man ever did. Don't cut the fruit trees down.

You can eat from them. Why would you cut down something that will sustain you and is good for you? He says leave them alone. He says because besides you're not fighting against a tree because that tree is not a man that you're you know besieging that tree.

He said only cut down the trees that you know are not good for food. Besides an oak tree is a lot better to build a siege work with than an apple tree. It just makes sense.

I don't think to have oak trees in Israel but I'm just saying from my own perspective. Right? Don't cut down the trees you can benefit from. Now this was starkly different because many people many kingdoms would intentionally go into places and there are records found even in Egypt where this happened and other places as well where they would do a slash and burn.

[33 : 58] Right? They would pride themselves in cutting every tree down and every harvest down and every field down because they knew if they destroyed the vegetation they were destroying the civilization.

God says it's not that way with you. Right? Don't destroy the land just secure your borders.

Fight differently. Your conduct is going to look different than anyone else. They're not out there wreaking havoc they're just out there pushing back darkness.

One of the great benefits that God's people have is when we fight the battle we are literally preserving the creation God has called us to live in.

Right? He's called us to enjoy this and we are reclaiming what God has created for our enjoyment. We are reclaiming what God has created for us to enjoy for His glory.

[35 : 04] We're not just mowing it down to try to push everybody else back. It's that thing I shared this morning I think it's time for the people of God to reclaim what the world took from us.

A lot of the things in creation are for our enjoyment. We look up to the heavens that's not so that we can find out what our horoscope is that is so we can declare wow God knows every star by name.

Right? When we look at creation it's not so that we can see mother earth and go hug a tree it's so that we can say wow God calls that tree to grow and to provide shade and to be an astounding display.

Now I like to cut trees down too and make boards out of them and see what's on the inside. I get that I understand that. Sometimes I hug trees but there are already logs by that time when I'm doing it but I'm still hugging them.

But again it's this appreciation when you open it up you're like wow God painted a canvas inside this thing called a tree log and it just declares his beauty.

[36 : 20]

Let's pray. We thank you so much. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your presence. God thank you for your people.

I thank you for the fellowship we have together. I pray that you would be glorified and honored. We ask it in Christ's name. Amen. We asked it in so, so, so, so, so, so, so, so, Thank you.

Thank you.