

**Be Strong and Courageous
Deuteronomy 31:1-8**

Brothers and sisters, think back in your own life for a moment to see if you can recall a time when you were standing on the edge of a transition. A time in your life right before some major change was going to occur...

Maybe it was the standing the back of the church right before the wedding ceremony started? Maybe it was in the car on the way to the hospital expecting your first child? Maybe it was sitting in the airport waiting to board the flight to take you to a new city or a new country to start a new job?

What were you feeling? What was going through your mind? Excitement, nervousness, anticipation, maybe fear, anxiety, doubt – wondering if you’d made the right decision... nagging thoughts that maybe you’d made a wrong decision... but there was no backing out now, you were committed to go down the path you had chosen.

I can recall such moments when I stood on the edge of transitions in life where things would not be the same as they were before. For me, the most impressionable change however was not getting married or the birth of my daughter or moving to Calgary almost 17 years ago to come and pastor Valleyview – as significant as those things were.

For me the transition where I was expecting to experience the most dramatic change was finishing off high school. I have a vivid memory of it – but not of the last day of school or the grad ceremony or receiving my diploma in the ceremony – rather it was at the after party, in a classmate’s basement where I had this sense of “finally...” Its finally all over, finally finished! It had seemed like forever, and really up until that point in my life being made to go to school, and my experiences and relationships at school pretty much defined my life.

And after a lifetime of enduring it – finally it was finished! Here I was standing on the edge of something different, I could do what I wanted to do after this, make my own choices

about what my day to day would look like and I could walk away from the people who I had been stuck with in school over the years, I didn't much like them and they didn't much like me...

It had been my reality for so many years, but now that was all about to change and it felt a bit surreal, unbelievable almost. Its something that comes to mind whenever I think about what it might be like when I'm faced with leaving this world and crossing over to the next and knowing that day might be close... leaving everything that is familiar and all that you've ever known and crossing over into something completely different that you've never experienced before.

That's the essence of standing on the edge of a transition brothers and sisters, and that is the context for our scripture passage this morning and the reason we are looking at it. I believe the Lord wants to speak to us this month about transitions, and to look at what Deuteronomy 31 and 32 have to say to us about transitions.

Not just because September is a time when we are transitioning back into our regular routines or perhaps transitioning into new routines... but because God's saving and sanctifying work in our lives sometimes reaches a point where a significant transition is coming up for us, and also because we've been praying for a year now with the Holy Spirit on what He new thing He will birth at Valleyview – and my sense is that will involve a transition.

So – the Lord wants to speak into your lives this morning to encourage us and prepare us for transitions.

And there are a lot of transitions in the first section of Deuteronomy 31 that we read this morning, aren't there. I'm sure you noticed that Moses is stepping down as the leader and Joshua is being appointed to take over – so there's a transition in leadership going on. And I'm sure you noticed that the people of Israel are being prepared for the transition of crossing the Jordan to go into the Promised Land.

But there are other transitions going on as well. Moses is preparing to transition out of this life into the next. And in the leadership transition Joshua has to transition from being Moses' assistant into being the people's leader.

The people of Israel will be transitioning from being desert nomads to settled land-owners, they will go from wandering around to having a clear direction, from being passive and having other nations attack them to claiming their promised land and attacking other nations. They will transition from enduring a time of God's judgement upon them to receiving God's blessing, from being the nation that God is judging to bringing God's judgement to ungodly nations.

There are a lot of transitions that are about to take place here when you think about it. And perhaps an argument can be made that these are not additional transitions but they are the implications of the main transitions that are happening, so maybe we could call them secondary transitions – but considering that starts to get you thinking about why these

transitions are happening and what is causing them.

A change in leadership is occurring not simply because of Moses' age, but because he is not allowed to enter the promised land as the consequence of his disobedience to God and the people's disobedience to God.

You see forty years earlier the people of Israel were standing at the edge of a transition, at the edge of the Promised land and they chickened out. They had sent 12 scouts into the land and while they could see it was a land of plenty – ten of the scouts who saw that the Canaanites were powerful and mighty did not believe the people of Israel were strong enough to take the land from them. They sowed doubt in the hearts of the people and the Israelites rebelled against God's command to go and take the land.

But two scouts – Caleb and Joshua – tried to encourage the people to have faith and trust and be obedient and take the land. They said *"If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will*

give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

But the people wouldn't listen, they chickened out and wanted to go back to Egypt – and as a result the Lord sentenced them to wandering in the desert until the entire generation of people who had disobeyed had died. Now forty years later the next generation of Israelites have been brought back to the Jordan, on the edge of a transition, to demonstrate their obedience where their unfaithful parents had failed.

But what about Moses' disobedience, well shortly after their failure to enter into the Promised land, while they were wandering in the desert they ran out of water and as usual the people began to grumble and complain and accuse Moses. Moses and Aaron sought the Lord's guidance on what to do and the Lord instructed Moses to speak to a particular rock and water would come out of the rock.

However – Moses struck the rock twice, with his staff instead of speaking to it, and in what he said it gave credit himself and Aaron for bringing water from the rock instead of God. As a result, God says to Moses and Aaron *“Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”*

Now that episode is a story for another time – I'm just bringing it up so that you understand why there has to be a transition in leadership as the people of Israel once again being given the opportunity to enter into the Promised Land.

So, when it comes to why are these transitions occurring, I think we can summarize it by saying it is both consequential and providential. The back story gives us the information about why this is happening as a consequence of people's sin, and vs. 7 in our scripture passage reminds us that it is also providential – in spite of people's sin.

This generation of Israelites is standing once again at the edge of transition not because, as we like to say “*God is the God of second chances*” but because God will never break His own word or promise in spite of our disobedience. God swore and covenantally promised to Abraham that his descendants would be a great nation and inherit this land and God was going to keep that promise through His providence.

So, as we realize this truth - how God’s promises and providence have brought about this transition, this second opportunity for Israel, there are a few more truths about transitions that we can glean from this passage and apply to times of transition in our own lives.

First, what’s taken you this far in life isn’t going to work anymore. Moses’ leadership for Israel had taken them out of slavery in Egypt, formed them into a covenant people with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai, preserved them in the face of God’s wrath when He wanted to wipe them out for their rebellious disobedience and unbelief, and sustained them through forty years of wandering in the wilderness – however.... Moses’

leadership was inadequate to lead the people into the promised land. Take note that he was not able to help the people overcome their fear and unbelief the first time around, and also – in connection with his disobedience in taking credit for water coming from the rock there was the very real danger that the people would see Moses giving them the Promised Land as opposed to God, Yahweh.

Brothers and sisters there are transition times in your life when what has taken you thus far won’t take you any further and something new is needed.

So – the second truth is God always provides the new thing that will take you forward. For the Israelites Joshua will be their new leader. Joshua was better equipped than Moses to take lead Israel through this transition. He had military experience in battle already, He had previously scouted out the land of Canaan and was familiar with it. Mostly importantly he had proved his faith in God and his willingness to step out in faith against a more powerful enemy because he knew that Israel’s military success came from God.

So brothers and sisters, when something new is needed to take you forward, ask God to open your eyes to see and look around for what God has already prepared to take you forward through the transition. He will reveal it to you and you need to embrace it and follow it.

Third, going through a transition is going to change you in some fundamental ways. Its good to know this ahead of time, be aware of it, so you can accept it and work with it instead of fighting it.

Crossing into the Promised Land meant the people of Israel would need to become assertive instead of being passive, they needed to attack the Canaanites instead of being on the defensive.

Certainly, there were all sorts of changes that would need to occur as well as they transitioned from being a wandering nomadic people to settling down. They would build houses and barns instead of living in tents. They would plow and plant and harvest crops instead of harvesting manna every

morning, but as I was thinking about how this transition would fundamentally change them it struck me that ever since they had left Egypt they had been fleeing, they had been on the receiving end of hostility and attacks from other nations, they were weak and scared, they were manna-fed, and then they were under God's judgement as well wandering around with no purpose.

This transition would change all that. They needed to change, crossing over the Jordan would change them as they now had to go and take something instead of fleeing from something. They needed to understand they were now being used by God for His judgement instead of being chastised by God's judgement. They needed to transition into what it would mean for them to cleanse the land of evil people and settle it as God's people.

Brothers and sisters, transitions will change us in fundamental ways like this, the sooner we accept it and cooperate with it the better we will align ourselves with God's purposes for bringing this transition into our lives.

Which brings me to the fourth transitional truth. While our scripture passage really emphasizes the truth that it is God who will cross over the Jordan to lead Israel into the Promised Land, and that God will be with the people and never leave them or forsake them, we mustn't miss the fact that this is all given to them so they will step across the Jordan in faith, responding in obedience.

And brothers and sisters – all of what we are learning about and hearing this morning from the Lord is being given to us so that we too – will step into whatever transitions the Lord is bringing into our lives, personally and as a church – in faith and in obedience.

Yes, it's true there are some transitions that happen to us regardless of what we do – ageing for example, . But the kind of transitions that the Holy Spirit is bringing about in our lives are the kind where we must step out in faith and enter into the transition in obedience. So maybe you've been standing at the edge of something in life, waiting and wondering if you

should go down that direction and looking for some sort of sign or a go ahead from the Lord.

Well this morning brothers and sisters, the Lords' word from this passage about transitions is *“be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or terrified for the Lord you God goes with you; he will never leave you or forsake you!”*

The truth is we might be waiting for a sign from God, when His word is sufficient for us and we need to step out in faith and in obedience.

Now – please note the obedience part of what I just said. I'm not giving anyone a free pass to “step out in faith” and do something that is disobedient to scripture and God's revealed will to us ok... don't go saying your pastor just gave you permission to step out in faith and disobey your parents, steal or run off with your secretary or something like that.

Now finally, we need to trust that transitions occur in God's perfect timing. Even ones that might be happening to us because someone ran off with their secretary...

In spite of Israel's disobedience, in spite of Moses disobedience, which would have seen Israel enter the Promised Land forty years earlier lead by Moses himself, the timing of the transition in Deut 31 is happening according to God's perfect timing within His sovereign plans.

This is implied with the specific mention of Moses age as 120 years old, and how it neatly divides Moses' life up into three segments. Moses was in Egypt for 40 years, fled and was in Midian as a shepherd for 40 years, lead Israel out of Egypt and ended up having to lead them in the desert for 40 years. Now God has determined the time is right to bring them back to claim the Promised land and to bring His judgement on those nations. God's perfect timing.

This is easier to see if you know the bigger picture as well. Many years earlier when God promised this land to Abraham

and his descendants, he also told Abraham they would not receive the Land until four hundred years later. They would go to live in a foreign land, would become enslaved and would only be brought back to the land *when the sins of the Amorites had reached their full measure...* when it was justified to judge them and destroy them.

So, while it might not seem like the right timing to us, while it could have happened 40 years earlier and Moses would have been able to lead Israel in and enjoy the Promised Land himself... its all happening now when he's 120 – but in God's overall plan it's the right time for this transition. So, trust that transitions are happening with God's perfect timing for His plans.

So, there are five truths about transitions you can take from the circumstances in this passage and use wisely in your own life – but I can't finish off this message without explain the ultimate transitional truth in this scripture passage.

Which is how this scripture points us and transitions us... to Jesus Christ.

You see, as I was studying this passage, I was suddenly struck by how it foreshadows the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Moses, who embodies and represents the Law and our responsibility to keep it as faithful Covenant partners with God, is not able to lead Israel into the Promised Land – he can't bring them where they need to go, where God is calling them. Moses himself had been disobedient to God and can't lead the people into the Promised Land.

The Apostle Paul articulates this more specifically in Rom 8:3 saying *"the law was powerless... because it was weakened by the flesh..."* Do you see how this is foreshadowed in this passage?

Then Paul continues on saying *"for what the law could not do, God did by sending his own Son..."* This is foreshadowed in our scripture passage in how God chooses Joshua to embody His power and presence crossing the Jordon to lead the

people into the Promised Land, and by the way the name Joshua in Hebrew is Yeshua, which means Yahweh will save His people, and... it's also how you pronounce the name Jesus in Hebrew – and it also means Yahweh will save His people.

And of all the transitions that can occur in our lives – the transition from striving to earn God's blessings through the Law, from thinking and believing that we're basically good people to realizing that our own righteousness won't get us any further, won't bring us into the Promise Land and instead trusting in Jesus' forgiveness and righteousness is the most difficult transition that we'll ever go through.

And all the truths about transitions apply just as much if not more.

We just covered what got you thus far won't get you any farther in terms of our own righteousness, and how God always provides something else to take you further in terms of Christ's righteousness.

And this transition is going to change us in some fundamental ways, perhaps its best to summarize it as Paul does in Galatians 5:19-23 *“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

And we need to step into this transition by faith and obedience as well – As Paul quotes in Romans 1:17 and Gal 3:11 *“the righteous will live by faith”* so that as he describes in Gal 3:17 *“the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit.”*

And brothers and sisters this promise of the Holy Spirit takes God’s command and encouragement from Deut 31:6 that we’ve heard this morning.... *“Be strong and courageous. Do*

not be afraid or terrified - for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” and it makes it a reality in our lives as it is spoken to us this morning.

We can obey this command, we can be strong, we can be courageous, not afraid or terrified because we as are reminded in 2 Tim 1:7 *“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”*

So brothers and sisters, for whatever transitions the Lord has you going through right now, whatever transition you may be standing on the edge of, for what the Lord will lead us to step into by faith and obedience as a Church in this new season of ministry... receive the Lord’s encouragement and command this morning.

Be strong and courageous – for the Lord your God is with you!

Amen