

“ENDINGS AND NEW BEGINNINGS”
Deuteronomy 31:1-8, 2 Kings 2:1-14, Acts 18:18-28
May 17 & 18, 2025

“In Texas they tell a story about a man who used to hitch up his horse every morning in front of the saloon. One morning the saloonkeeper came out and found that the horse was hitched in front of the Methodist Church. He saw the man walking down the street and called out, ‘Say, why is your horse hitched in front of the Methodist Church this morning?’

“The man turned around and said, ‘Well, last night I was converted in the revival meeting, and I’ve changed hitching posts.’

“That’s what it means to be born again. That’s what it means to be converted. That’s what it means to be separated from the world. It means that you change hitching posts.

“It means a change of habits, motivations, lifestyle, and everything in your life. Commitment to God will inevitably have a transforming effect. You will know that you have been born again because you will want to obey God in every way. Do your actions and choices reveal that you’ve hitched yourself to the Lord?”¹

When we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, it creates a desire in us to follow Him, to let the things of this world go, and to change our lives so that all we do and say reflects our faith in Jesus. It can be the easiest decision in all of our lives, and it can be the most difficult decision in our whole lives. The moment we seek a change in who we are, it means ending one part of our life and starting a new part of our life. We give up on one way of living and we begin living totally new.

The first two Scripture lessons today demonstrate the change that takes place in the lives of people, and the call for courage and strength in the Lord to guide each one who puts their trust

¹ (Billy Graham, *Peace for Each Day*, [India: Thomas Nelson Press, 2020) May 12, pg. 139)

in the Lord. They tell of possible new life that God will lead us into, and they tell us of what was done when the decision was made to end, and then begin again.

As the people of Israel were approaching the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 31), Moses spoke to them, calling them to put their faith in the Lord and to accept God's new beginning. They faced enemies and trials in the new land, but Moses reminds them about what God did with other peoples as they moved from Egypt toward the land God had promised them. The people had seen great things of the Lord, but Moses wanted them to remain faithful to their God who had brought them to that point. He calls for them to "*be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Deut. 31:6).

Then, knowing that he would not go into the Promised Land, Moses instructed Joshua about taking over his leadership position of the people. He also tells Joshua, "*Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*" (31:7).

The people and Joshua had to know that the Lord would always be with them so that they could go into the new land and allow God to deliver it to them. They had to trust that God was for them, and that God was with them in order to gain the land from those who resided in it. Without faith in the Lord, without knowing that God would be with them always, they might begin to question and to wander away from following the Lord God. It would take strength and courage to remain committed to the Lord.

This was the end of their aimless wandering through the wilderness. They had to let

Egypt go, and then to trust in the Lord, who had led them for past 40 years. It was time to begin a new kingdom in the land that God had promised their ancestors - the kingdom of Israel. And that would take faith, strength and courage to follow the Lord's words and commands each day, so that He could supply them with "*the land flowing with milk and honey*" (Exodus 3:8). It was the ending of Moses' leadership of the people and the beginning of Joshua's leadership.

And that is the challenge that faces each person as we consider leaving the ways of the world to follow the ways of the Lord Jesus. God has been providing for us throughout our lives, but there comes a time when we must take that step of faith and leave our own Egypt to gain the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. We have to be strong and courageous so that we remain faithful to the Lord. It has to be the end of us, that the beginning of God working in us.

Elisha found that to be true, too, as he was preparing to follow the prophet Elijah. In 2 Kings 2 we see how Elisha would not leave Elijah's side regardless of what others were saying to him. He would not be convinced to abandon his master, even though the prophets were telling him that Elijah would be taken from him that day. Elisha remained committed to following the one who had called him into ministry with him. His only request was to receive a double portion of the Spirit of God upon him when Elijah was taken from him. And in order to receive that, he had to see Elijah taken from him.

You heard today how that happened. It was the ending of Elijah's ministry, and the beginning of Elisha's ministry. And as Elisha took up Elijah's cloak, he immediately found the power of the Spirit of God working in him to continue the work of the Lord among the people.

In both these cases, it meant saying "Good Bye" to a friend, and to an old way of life in order to begin a new adventure with the Lord. It meant changing the hitching post from the usual way that was lived, and starting a new life beyond. It can be an easy thing to do at times,

and it can be a very difficult thing to do at other times. Starting over involves our whole commitment to the new way of life, turning from one thing, and beginning another.

Take for example Frederick Douglass. “Frederick Douglass grew up as a slave in Maryland in the early nineteenth century and experienced slavery's every brutality. He was taken from his mother when he was only an infant. For years as a child, all he had to eat was runny corn meal dumped in a trough that kids fought to scoop out with oyster shells. He worked in the hot fields from before sunup until after sundown. He was whipped many times with a cowhide whip until blood ran down his back. He was kicked and beaten by his master until he almost died. And he was attacked with a spike by a gang of whites.

“But even so, when Frederick considered trying to escape to freedom, he struggled with the decision. He writes in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, that he had two great fears.

“The first was leaving behind his friends. He said, ‘I had a number of warm-hearted friends in Baltimore—friends that I loved almost as much as I did my life—and the thought of being separated from them forever was painful beyond expression. It is my opinion that thousands would escape from slavery, who now remain, but for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their friends.

“His second fear was this: ‘If I failed in this attempt, my case would be a hopeless one—it would seal my fate as a slave forever.’

“Today, people who find themselves in slavery to sin, and who think about escaping to freedom in Christ, may have similar fears. They may fear leaving behind friends. They may fear they'll fail in their attempt to break from sin and live free for God. They should take heart from Douglass's experience.

“On September 3, 1838, he remembers: ‘I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind. . . . I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a Free State. . . . It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. . . . I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions.’”²

Frederick had to be strong and courageous in order to complete this huge transition in life. And once he established that move from slavery to freedom, it was no turning back. The difference was so profound that there was never any yearning for the old life. He was focused on the new life that God had provided for him.

This is the goal of God for each one of us, that we should leave the ways of the world and find such delight and joy in the ways of God that we never look back. We are encouraged to turn from the mindless practices of our society and turn instead to the saving ways of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For at one time we were dead in our transgressions and sins against God’s laws and commandments, seeking our own ways and our own pleasures instead. The world entices us to gratify the cravings of our flesh and follow its desires and thoughts, and in so doing, we disregard the laws and commands of the Lord, deserving only of His wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3). And generation after generation have been raised and taught that this is the way that we should live, pursuing wealth, possessions, property, earthly delights and sexual pleasures regardless of how those pursuits affects others. We’ve been taught to get as much as we can, as fast as we can, from whomever we can, in any way that we can, for as long as we can, and this is what defines success. And we’ve been led to believe that God’s ways are just a stumbling block to our getting all that we want, so we should disregard all of His ways and pursue our own ways.

² (PreachingToday.com, “*Perfect Illustrations*,” [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 192)

But that only leads us to live for today only and forget about tomorrow. That mindset locks us into slavery to sin, and it destines us to an eternity in God's absence. As we pursue our own wants and wishes, we give up God's wants and wishes for us, and we eventually end up in destruction.

"But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-7). And when we chose God's great love for us, it demands a change in hitching posts, for us to leave the things of this world and turn toward the mercy and grace of God. But that can be a very difficult thing to do.

Len Sullivan, of Tupelo, Mississippi, gives us an idea of the temptation to hold onto the old life while still pursuing the new life. He puts it like this: "In the late 1920s, my grandparents married and moved into Grandpa's old family home. It was a clapboard house with a hall down the middle. In the '30s they decided to tear down the old house and build another to be their home for the rest of their lives. Much to my grandmother's dismay, many of the materials of the old house were reused in their new house. They used old facings and doors, and many other pieces of the finishing lumber. Everywhere my grandmother looked, she saw that old house--old doors that wouldn't shut properly, crown molding split and riddled with nail holes, unfinished window trimming. It was a source of grief to her. All her life she longed for a new house.

"When God brings us into the kingdom, the old way of living must be dismantled and discarded."³ Then new ways of God must be fully embraced and followed from then on - no reruns, no returns, and no recycling of the old life.

³ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 192)

And that is the message that the Apostle Paul presented to Jews and Gentiles throughout his journeys. Having come to faith in Jesus Christ after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul presented the love of God for all of us through Jesus to those who were looking for the Messiah. Everywhere he went, he addressed the Jews first, to try to help them see what God had done to fulfill His promise of the Messiah who would save us from the sins of the world so that we might find eternal life through Jesus. And then Paul went to the Gentiles when the Jews refused to believe in Jesus. He worked diligently to lead many to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to enable them to find the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives.

We pick back up in the Book of Acts with Paul completing his second missionary journey, and then starting out on his third journey. This is Acts 18:18-28. (READ Acts 18:18-28)

Paul was interested in leading many people out of their worship of pagan gods to find eternal life with Jesus. He wanted his own country men and women to find Jesus in the midst of the Scriptures so that they might rejoice in God's fulfilled promise of His Messiah. And when the people turned from their former practices to follow Jesus, their lives were transformed and they were able to see the great work of God for all the people of the world. God had sent His only Son, Jesus, to become the perfect Sacrifice for the payment of our sins that separate us from God the Father. It is only through Jesus Christ that we find forgiveness, experiencing God's mercy and grace in the process. God's mercy removed the penalty of sin, not giving us what we do deserve because of our rebellion against God's ways. God's grace creates the opportunity for new life that we don't deserve because we are sinners, yet because of Jesus' death on the cross and our faith in Him, we get God's favor, being new creatures in Christ Jesus.

Paul finished up his first missionary journey by visiting Ephesus, striving to help folks

come to know Jesus. Then he goes back to Jerusalem to report all that God was doing through him to bring Jew and Gentile to faith in Jesus. And then he takes a rest back home in Antioch (Acts 18:22).

In the meantime, another Jew named Apollos began teaching about the work of the Lord Jesus in Ephesus. Being counseled by Priscilla and Aquila, he comes to know the power of the Holy Spirit and begins encouraging many others to grow deeper in their faith in the Lord. And he continues the work that Paul had begun, not only in Asia, in the city of Ephesus, but then on to Achaia, into the region of the Greeks. He's not competing with Paul, but rather encouraging the followers of Jesus to continue to grow in their faith so that the people around them might also hear of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's ending of his second missionary journey gave rise to others stepping up to take the message of Jesus further into the world so that all people might know of the Salvation of the Lord. Those new beginnings touched the lives of many more, bringing transformed believers.

That's the purpose of our coming to Christ Jesus, too. As we turn our lives over to Jesus Christ, we are to work diligently for Him, not to build up our own little domain around us, but to advance the Kingdom of God by helping others see the difference Jesus makes in us as we let Him be our Savior and Lord. We have to switch our hitching posts from focusing on the things of the world, to living for Jesus in all that we do, so that people around us who have not yet heard about Jesus, or those weak in their faith, might grow deeper in Him.

Father, thank You for Your call in our lives to shift our focus from the world to focus on Jesus as Lord of our life. Give us the courage to make a clean break from all the things of our old nature, living here in the world as disciples of Jesus, but not being of the world. Give us the strength and courage to live for You every day of our lives, even if it means starting anew. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, so that He might guide and direct us in all we do and say. For it's in His Name we pray. AMEN