

Deuteronomy 32

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[0 : 00] Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. Now, if these words ring any bells with you, then you are mature in years. That's the best way I could put it, a bit like myself.

The iconic BBC Radio children's program, Listen with Mother, that ran from the 50s, I think, into the early 80s, began with these memorable words, Are you sitting comfortably? And it's nice to sit comfortably. I don't know how comfortable you are in our pews here this morning, but it is nice to sit comfortably. It's pleasant to curl up on the couch to watch a film or a favorite TV program. It's very comfortable. And on a bigger scale in our lives, many of us work towards the goal of being comfortable. It's interesting how sometimes people respond to the question, do you want to be rich and wealthy? And generally, people will say, oh, no, I'm not interested in wealth. That's maybe not what they really think, but that's what they say. I just want to be comfortable. That's what I want. I want a comfortable life for me and my family.

And of course, there's nothing wrong with enjoying comfort. There's nothing wrong in and of itself of aspiring to be comfortable ourselves and those we love and care for. But the danger is that we can get too comfortable and as a result fail to do those things that we ought to do. Let's think of this past winter that is, I say past, more in hope than in reality. But let's just imagine that winter has passed. But just imagine it's this long winter we've had. And how many times perhaps of an evening, you know, it was your intention to do something, to go somewhere, maybe to go to the neighborhood fellowship or the prayer meeting or to visit somebody you really felt you wanted to visit and should visit or do something important or useful. But you were just so comfortable. You know, the couch, the gravitational pull of the couch was remarkable. And you just couldn't get out and had to do or go where you had intended to go. You were just so comfortable. And there, comfort becomes a dangerous thing.

As Christians, we have to be particularly wary of getting too comfortable. We are soldiers called to battle. We have a mission to fulfill and a world to win. And getting too comfortable can be a mortal enemy of effective and courageous Christian service. This morning, I want us to consider a beautiful picture painted in the Bible that describes an occasion when God had to stir up the nest of His own people and forced them to be what He had called them to be and to go where He had called them to go.

An occasion when God acted, in the words of our passage in Deuteronomy, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.

[3 : 38] There in Deuteronomy chapter 32 and verse 11. And everything we say this morning really will revolve around this picture that is painted in the Song of Moses. Now, before spending a little time developing the picture and drawing the lessons to be learned, we do need to establish the historical context of the Song of Moses within which these words are found. Moses is close to death.

You only need to turn a couple of pages in your Bibles if you have them open at chapter 32, and you'll notice how that book ends with an account of the death of Moses. His time was coming to an end. Soon, Joshua would take his place and lead the people into the promised land.

But in order to do so, they would need to cross the Jordan and conquer the promised land. And indeed, having crossed the Jordan, having conquered the land, they would have to live as God's people in the promised land. And all of this would bring its own challenges. And this song was intended to exhort the people, to prepare the people for this new, exciting, but also frightening chapter in their adventure as the people of God. We notice how we have some indication of the purpose of the Song in its entirety in words that we have recorded at the very end, once the Song is concluded. And then we read in verse 45 of chapter 32, when Moses finished reciting all these

words to all Israel, he said to them, Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you.

They are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess. Now certainly those words relate not only to the words of the Song. They go beyond that to all that Moses had said to them, but certainly the words that we find in the Song of Moses are also included there. Now our concern this morning is really a relatively modest one. What we want to do is to consider these beautiful words that we find in chapter 32 and in verse 11, and listen to what God may be saying to us, to you, by these words. And in order to help us do that, we may need to begin by developing, or not really developing, but visualizing the picture that is being painted there in verse 11. The picture is of this nest, and in the nest are the little eaglets, and the eaglets are very comfortable in their nest. And the very picture of a nest generates in our mind the idea of some more warm and comfortable and safe. You know, we speak even of our own homes as our wee nest. We speak of our families as a wee nest, because it gets across that idea. And of course, the young, the eagles young there, they're comfortable. They have food to eat. The food is brought by the mother eagle, the father eagle. I'm afraid I don't know much about eagles, so you'll forgive me if some of my eagle references are maybe not accurate. But you have the idea. They're warm in their nest. They're secure in their nest. As young eaglets, they're not burdened with any great responsibility, no work to do. Everything provided for them. And you can imagine these little eagles, inasmuch as they're able to ponder on their lot. I don't know how much eagles spend time thinking about their circumstances, but if you bear with me or humor me as we think about these little eagles pondering on their circumstances. They enjoy the comfort of the nest, the warmth of the nest, the food that is provided for them, the company of their brothers and sisters. They're happy in the nest. But then they look over the edge, the edge of the nest, and they see mom and dad flying through the sky, and they're thinking, wow, that's cool. You know, I'd like to do that. I want to fly as well. I want to fly like they fly. Yes, the nest, it's comfortable, it's warm, but I want to fly. And I wonder if in their tender days or weeks, I don't even know how long they're in the nest before they do eventually fly, they look over and they say, well, yeah, it'd be nice to fly, but it looks pretty scary out there. That is one big drop. I'm staying put. I'm staying in my nest. I'm comfortable here. You see, outside the nest is the unknown. Outside the nest, there's danger, enemies, real or imagined. Often imagined enemies are greater than real ones in our own mind and in the power that they hold over us. They imagine they could never survive outside the nest. They don't want to leave the company and the warmth of the nest. But mother eagle knows that they have to learn to fly, and so she encourages them and prods them in the language of the verse. She stirs up the nest. She makes it uncomfortable. It's very comfortable. It's very warm. It's very safe. But mother comes and stirs up the nest. She doesn't force them out, at least not to begin with. She doesn't push them out, but she stirs up the nest. I wonder how the eaglets feel the first time that they're stirred up, that the nest is stirred up, that they're prodded over the edge, maybe eventually, if they're resisting too much, forced out. I wonder how they feel. Well, they soon discover, however it is they feel, if they feel anything at all, they soon discover that they're not alone, even on the outside in the big bad world. [9 : 48] Because as we read in verse 11, the mother spreads its wings to catch them. It hovers over its young in protection of them. And so, even on the outside, they know the care and the protection of their mother. Well, that's the picture that is being used in the song of Moses to speak of God's care and of God's dealings with His people Israel. They were comfortable in Egypt. Now, that may sound strange, because when we think of the Israelites in Egypt, we know, well, they were slaves in Egypt.

But of course, they hadn't always been slaves for a great deal of their time in Egypt. At the beginning, they were honored guests. And of course, while Joseph was alive and while his memory was still fresh, they were treated very favorably. They were comfortable. They had all that they could wish for and more. And then the generations passed, and they became more comfortable, more ensconced in Egypt. But then even as things turned awry, even as things began to turn against them, even as the Egyptians began to put the pressure on them, the Egyptians began to put the pressure on them, and to treat them not as guests, but now as slaves. Even then, there was a sense in which they remained comfortable. They had food to eat. They had a roof over their heads. They were, in a measure, secure, little in the way of responsibility. And of course, they knew nothing else.

They'd been there for so long. But Egypt was not their home. It had served as their God-appointed nest, if you wish, for a season. But God had bigger and better plans for them. And so, God begins to stir up their nest. He makes Egypt increasingly uncomfortable. We know the story, don't we, of how they had to make the bricks, and how they were then told that they had to make the bricks without straw.

They had to go and find their own straw. It wouldn't be provided for them. And they had to make just as many bricks as they'd made before. These heavy and unreasonable and oppressive demands that were being placed upon them, and the violence that was inflicted on them when they didn't meet their quota of bricks on any given day. And so, God stirs up their nest.

And Pharaoh is morally culpable for the injustice and the cruelty that he visited upon them. But we have to recognize, and these are things that are difficult for us to understand, but we have to recognize that even behind the cruelty of Pharaoh, though God shares no moral responsibility for his injustice, God was at work. God was stirring up the nest, making Egypt an increasingly uncomfortable place to be. And then, of course, we know in the events immediately leading up to the Exodus, all the plagues and all that that brought with them. But there wasn't only the fact that God was making Egypt uncomfortable. There was also the vision offered of something better, something far better, the picture of the eagles wanting to fly. Well, God also gave to the people a picture of something much better for them to look forward to and to aspire to. If we look in Exodus chapter 6, in verses 6 and 8, we get an idea, a flavor of that. God is giving Moses instructions as to what he is to say to the people in the midst of Pharaoh, dealing with them harshly. And we read, [13:46] Therefore say to the Israelites, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.

Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord." This picture, this vision of the promised land, of a better place that God had for them. But of course, we know that even with the nest becoming increasingly uncomfortable, even with the picture painted of this better place for them to go to, even then they were reluctant, even then they were unsure, even then they were hesitant. Because we immediately read in what follows it in Exodus chapter 6 and in verse 9, Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage. Instead of it being a reason for them to say, yes, we want to hear this message, they very bizarrely and in a very contradictory way, really, see it as a reason not to listen. But God is at work, stirring up the nest, prodding them out, pushing them in the direction that they are to go. And finally, of course, the nest is, as it were, turned over, and the people are on their way. Indeed, the language that we find in Exodus of God leading them to the promised land is also a language that uses the imagery of the eagle carrying her young. In Exodus chapter 19 and verse 4, we read, You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. Well, this is the picture. This is the way the picture applied on the occasion that the song was sung, the song was recited to the people of Israel. How God, as an eagle, stirred up the nest that they were in, and prodded them out, and protected them, and carried them, that they might fly. But what has the picture got to say to us? What has the picture got to say to you this morning? We certainly profit from remembering God's saving work in history.

It is a good thing for us as the people of God, the same people of God in direct line from the people of God of whom we are speaking. It's good to remember what God has done for us in ages past. It's good for us to remember how He redeemed His people from slavery in Egypt. It's good especially for us to recognize and remember how that deliverance pointed forward to God's greatest redemptive mission in the sending of His Son Jesus to redeem us from slavery to sin. And that is good. It's good for us to remember these things. But what about you and me today? Does God still, like the mother eagle, stir our own comfortable nests and push us out that we might fly, that we might be the people He would have us be, that we would do what He would have us do, that we would go where He would have us go?

I want us to consider three questions. And really, all I'm going to do is pose the questions. I think the answers on this occasion really lie with yourselves. Three questions to consider that we can

draw from this picture that we have painted in Deuteronomy. The first question I want to ask you this morning is, do you want to fly? Do you want to fly? Do you want to be what God wants you to be?

[17 : 53] Maybe you're saying, well, I don't know what God wants me to be. It's good if you have that honesty to say that and to recognize that. Well, do you want to find out? Do you want to know what God would have you be? Do you want to live the life that God would have you live? Do you want to live the life that God has created you and saved you to live? Life to the full, life to the glory of God, a life full of gospel challenge and adventure, a life that is useful and pleasing to God. Do you want to fly?

As you look out of your nest, do you have that niggling feeling that somehow life is passing you by, and you still have to take flight? How do you respond to the words recorded for us by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 40, words that we've already shared with the children? Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. Even listening to these words, how do you respond to them? Do they describe you? Have you done any soaring lately? Are you scared of the very prospect of soaring?

Could it be that you can jump on a plane without a second thought, and yet you are, as a Christian, afraid to fly? But do you want to fly? Because if you want to fly, that certainly is a very good place to start. The little eaglets that want to fly. They still need to be prodded. They still need to be encouraged. They still need that little push. But the process is a lot less painful than for those who don't want to fly at all. And this picture of the nest is, I think, particularly applicable to Christians. It is used by Moses to describe God's people. And yet, though it is particularly applicable to those who are Christians, I think it is also a word of challenge to those who are in the nest, if you wish, of the visible church, but who as yet have not decided for Jesus Christ, as yet have not put their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Maybe that's you this morning. You're part of this congregation.

[20 : 22] You're here this morning, and we're very glad that you are here this morning. Perhaps you've been brought up in the church. Perhaps not. You feel, and you are in a very real sense, part of the family. And yet, while others have learned to fly, while others have launched out in faith to live for Jesus, you remain in the nest. And the question I have for you is, do you want to be a Christian? Do you want to put your trust in Jesus? Do you want to live for Him? Do you want to fly? Do you want to fly? The second question I want to challenge you with this morning is this, what holds you back? What holds you back?

Christian friend, you want to fly. You want to live that life that God has saved you to live. What holds you back? Is it the comfort of your own nest? The comfort of a Christian life that is predictable and safe and well within your comfort zone? Are you held back by the comfort of being free from demanding personal commitments in the service of God? That's not for you. That would interfere too much with your life and all the plans that you have. Are you held back by the comfort of keeping a tight rein on your own stuff, your money, your time, your life? The comfort of knowing that you're unlikely to fall because you fail to run, unlikely to suffer the indignity of a crash landing because, well, you never take flight. Are you just a little too comfortable in your job, a little too comfortable living in this city? Perhaps, dare I say it, a little too comfortable in being part of this congregation. I'm just asking the questions. It's for you to answer them. Or might it be that what holds you back is fear of the unknown? It's a big drop out of that nest. The wind blows strongly. There are dangers known and unknown. It might be for you the fear of sharing the good news of the gospel with others, the fear of serving God in a way or in a ministry that you're unfamiliar with, the fear of going where you've never been or doing what you've never done. Do these things hold you back? But it's time to fly. God is stirring up your nest. Well, I certainly trust that He is. And for those of you who have yet to put your trust in Jesus as your own Lord and Savior, what is holding you back from doing so from trusting in Him? Is it the comfort of your nest, the comfort of your life, of your routine, of church as a place where you can be a passive spectator rather than an active protagonist?

But let me ask you this. Are you really that comfortable in your nest? Or are you like the Israelites in Egypt? Their comfort was bondage. They couldn't see that this cell they were in, comfortable though it might have appeared, was that it was a cell. You see, it's possible to wander comfortably through life all the way to a lost eternity. Perhaps you're afraid of the unknown, unsure as to what is involved in being or becoming a Christian, afraid of what others will say or think, afraid of the commitment that will accompany professing faith in Jesus Christ, afraid of failure, of not living up to

what is involved or what you understand as being involved. Maybe like the eaglets, you look over the edge of your nest. You see how others fly, and you want to fly, but you don't know how. What is holding you back? There's a final question I want to pose this morning, and it's this.

Is the Lord stirring up your nest? The Lord stirred up the nest of the Israelites in Egypt big time. He dragged them, as it were, kicking and screaming from their nest into the wilderness and onto the promised land. Is He stirring up your nest? Christian friend, what about you? What about you? Is He stirring up your nest? And I'm speaking to you as an individual right now. Yes, this can be applied to the way in which God can stir up a congregation and a denomination and indeed a nation. But what about you is the Lord stirring up your nest? Is the Word of God discomfoting you? Is there an area of your life that you really know that you need to get sorted, but you just aren't quite getting round to doing anything about it? Perhaps an opportunity for Christian witness or service that you need to grasp, but you can't just quite get round to doing so. Is God gently prodding you in a new, maybe exciting, but frightening direction? Is God perhaps in providence using unpleasant and difficult and painful and unexpected circumstances to stir up your nest? Maybe difficulties at work or doors that are closing that you wish would open, perhaps health issues that you would much rather weren't a part of your horizon, but they are. Challenging family circumstances, to put it delicately. It's always good to ask the question, Lord, what are you saying to me? What are you saying to me in all of this?

[26 : 07] Are you stirring up my nest? But looking beyond our lives as individuals, is the Lord stirring up His church? Is He stirring up our nation? And though we could spend a lot of time considering that, all I would do at this juncture and this morning is this, is ask you, Christian friend, what opportunities is God giving you as a believer, as a witness to Jesus Christ, as He stirs up perhaps the lives of those with whom you have contact, as He stirs up our city and nation? What opportunities does that bring us as the church of Jesus Christ? But what of those of you who have as yet not repented and put your trust in Jesus? Is the Lord stirring up your nest? Is the Word of God disturbing or disquieting you in a way that perhaps it didn't do in the past? Perhaps a friend who is very kindly and sensitively, or maybe not so sensitively, challenging you? Is there perhaps a sense that you have that there must be more to life than this, a growing sense of guilt and of need, need for forgiveness and new life? Perhaps you're fearful of the consequences of failing to repent and believe, and you do well to be fearful of those consequences. Perhaps increasingly drawn to Jesus, the person of Jesus, in all His wonder and beauty, increasingly drawn to Him, and to the gospel. Perhaps for you there are difficult, unwelcome circumstances in life that are shaking and stirring you. Might it be that God is stirring up your nest?

What must you do? What must we all do? How can we fly? Well, let's return to Isaiah. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint. We have to hope in the Lord. We have to rest in Jesus. We have to put our trust in Him. All of us, continually, put our trust in Him as our Savior and our Lord, and as we do so, take that step into the unknown, trusting that He will uphold us. Now, maybe it's a big deal. Maybe it's something big. Maybe God wants you to be a missionary in Mongolia. But maybe it's something small. Maybe it's inviting that neighbor for a coffee just to build that friendship and see how you can be one who shows the love of Jesus to them. Maybe it's inviting somebody to come along to Christianity Explored or a parenting course or to church. I don't know what it is, but I want you to think about what it is that you need to do, what it is that you need to do that you feel uncomfortable with, that it's difficult, that you would rather not do, but you're conscious that God is stirring up your nest and we're prodding you gently or forcefully to do that, to go to that place, to do that thing.

Be assured that as you do step out, He will, in the words of our text, He is the one who hovers over His young, who spreads His wings to catch them. And so, when you do fall, when you do fail, when you do fall flat in your face, when things don't work as you would hope they would work, He is there with you, caring for you, and helping you, and upholding you. Do you want to fly? What's holding you back?

Is God stirring up your nest? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you. We thank you that you are a God who is interested in us. You're not a God who looks down indifferent to the way we live and what we believe and how we behave. We might imagine that a God who is so great and so powerful, and we stand in contrast to you as so small, and we appear to be so insignificant. What possible interest could you have in the likes of us? But you do. You are interested in us. You do

want us to live those lives that you have created us to live, lives to the full. We are reminded of Jesus and the words that He declared concerning His own mission, that He had come, that we might have life, and life to the full. And what a tragedy it is, what a lost opportunity when we fail to live that life that we have been called to live, when we get too comfortable, when we hold back from the service that we ought to render and the obedience that we owe to You. Lord, we pray that You would help us, that You would remove the obstacles that stand in our way, be they real or imagined, that You would help us by Your Spirit to put our trust constantly and continually in Yourself, and as we trust in You, so to step out in faith and to discover that You are indeed there alongside us and underneath us and going before us. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Now, we'll close our service this morning singing from Psalm 36, page 44 in our psalm book, Psalm 36, and we'll sing verses 5 to 9. We'll sing these verses to the tune Huddersfield.

[31 : 53] Your steadfast love is great, O Lord. It reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky. And notice words that we find there in verse 7. How precious is your steadfast love! What confidence it brings, both high and low. Find shelter in the shadow of your wings. Psalm 36, verses 5 to 9. We'll stand to sing.

Psalm 36, verses 5 to 9. We'll stand to sing. Psalm 36, verses 5 to 9. We'll sing. Your faithfulness is wonderful, and we'll sing. Your faithfulness is wonderful, and we'll sing.

Your faithfulness is wonderful, and we'll sing. Your faithfulness is wonderful, and we'll sing.

Your faithfulness is wonderful, and we'll sing. Your faithfulness is wonderful, and we'll sing. and standing to the sky.

Your righteousness is very great, like mountains high and sea.

[33 : 12] Your righteousness is my motionless, of man and peace to me.

How precious is your steadfast love, what love the dancing reigns.

O high and low I shelter in, the shadow of your wings.

In peace within your arms and rip from streams of your divine.

For if you live the source of life, in your light, grace be high.

[34 : 44] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen.