

LIFE GROUP LEADER GUIDE

The Cloud: Fanny Crosby

Deuteronomy 31:19-22



SERMON NOTES

Exegesis

Deuteronomy 31:19-22 – “Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel. For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant. And when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring). For I know what they are inclined to do even today, before I have brought them into the land that I swore to give.”

Here's a summary of the key themes in the Song of Moses found in Deuteronomy 32:

- **God's Greatness and Faithfulness:** The song begins by exalting God's character, His perfection, and His justice (Deuteronomy 32:3-4).
- **Israel's Unfaithfulness:** Moses contrasts God's faithfulness with Israel's corruption and rebellion (Deuteronomy 32:5-6).
- **God's Care for Israel:** The song recounts how God found Israel in the wilderness, cared for them, and led them (Deuteronomy 32:10-14).
- **Israel's Apostasy:** Despite God's blessings, Israel turned to idolatry and abandoned God, leading to His anger and the consequences of their actions (Deuteronomy 32:15-25).
- **God's Judgment and Mercy:** The song ends with a reminder that, despite Israel's disobedience, God will ultimately vindicate His people and show mercy (Deuteronomy 32:36-43).

As our passage shows, God orders Moses to write and teach this song for the people going into the land. The goal is to be a witness against them if they turn away. In other words, the song outlines the covenant promises and faithfulness of God and warns of the consequences awaiting them if they stray after other gods. The song was an instructor. The song was a sermon. One of the people used mightily of the Lord to teach others through song is Fanny Crosby.

Biography

One person said about her: "She set more hearts and voices to praising God than any other woman who ever lived."

Frances Jane Crosby (Fanny), was born March 24, 1820 in Putnam County, New York. She got an eye infection at 6 weeks old. They treated it with an ointment (hot mustard) that scarred her eyes. The doctor (an unlicensed con man) skipped town once the reality set in. A few months later, her father died. Her mother goes to work as a maid. So she is raised by her grandmother who is a strong Christian woman that taught the Bible to Fanny. She was never angry about her blindness. She was asked about it her whole life. She remarked, "If I had a choice, I would still choose to remain blind...for when I die, the first face I will ever see will be the face of my blessed Saviour."

The first poem she wrote was when she was 8 years old:

Oh, what a happy soul I am!
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot, nor I won't!

Fanny was incredibly bright. She was not only good with words, but she learned to play the piano as well. Her mind was sharp, and she pushed it. She memorized 5 chapters of the Bible per week. By the time she was 15 years old, she had memorized the Pentateuch (first 5 books of the Bible), the Gospels, the Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and many psalms by heart.

She went to the very first institute of the blind (15 years old). And eventually became a teacher there. She gained national attention for her poetry. In 1841, at 21 years old, she contributed a poetic eulogy on President William Henry Harrison to the *New York Herald*. In 1843, she became the first woman to ever speak in front of the U.S. Senate, reading a poem and lobbied for the establishment of institutes for the blind in every state. So it is important to recognize in these years of her life, Fanny gained celebrity status as a poet and advocate for the blind.

Fanny married Alexander Van Alstyne in 1858, who was also blind, who taught at the school, and used to be one of her pupils. They got pregnant but lost the little girl. Their marriage struggled after this. Eventually in 1880 (60 years old), they started living apart. They remained married and friends until his death in 1902, but their marriage never became what either of them envisioned.

At 31 years old, she was singing a song and had an overwhelming sense of the grace of God and truly surrendered herself to Him. It was in 1864, in her mid-forties, Fanny began writing hymns. She would sometimes write 6-7 per day, but she often wrote them in her mind, stored them there and worked on them there until they could be written down. She would work on upwards to 40+ songs in her mind at a time. In total, she wrote over 9000 hymns — 15 hymnals stacked on top of each other. She wrote so many hymns she actually developed pen names because she was so embarrassed to have her name on so many hymns: Ella Dale, Jenny V, Viola, Grace J Francis, Lizzy Edwards, and upwards to 200 other names!

Her writing was truly a gift. The sharp mind, coupled with the saturation of Scripture she stored in it, helped her to write with precision. On one occasion, in 1868, a composer and friend of Fanny's by the name of William Howard Doan knocked on her door. He had a train to catch in 40 minutes. He was on his way to a Sunday School convention in Cincinnati, OH and was supposed to have a new hymn to share. He had a tune, but no lyrics. Doan goes into Fanny's and sits at the piano and starts to play. Fanny stops him and says she had been thinking about a Bible verse all morning: Deuteronomy 33:27: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them." Doan had 30 minutes left. Fanny asked him to play the tune again. She wrote the hymn out over the next 15 minutes that is known today as *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*. She told Mr. Doan, "Your music says, 'Safe in the arms of Jesus.' What could be more appropriate for boys and girls at a Sunday School convention?" She folded the piece of paper with the lyrics on it, put it in an envelope and sent Mr. Doan to catch his train, telling him, "Open it on the train." The song would become world renowned. *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* was played often at funerals, especially children's funerals. It also became a popular lullaby. On August 8th, 1885, it was played at the funeral of American President Ulysses S. Grant.

Her blindness helped her to write hymns that spoke to the real issues Christians faced in walking daily with the Lord. She remarked, “The most enduring hymns are born in the silences of the soul, and nothing must be allowed to intrude while they are being framed into language.” She saw her blindness as a gift from the Lord as an opportunity to serve Him with more focus and dependence. She had to rely on the Lord because of her blindness. But she also avoided other distractions as a result. She said, “It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered to me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.”

She met 3 US Presidents: Polk, Van Buren, Grover Cleveland. She was good friends with Cleveland because he worked at the institute before entering politics. He even wrote down many of her poems for her. They remained lifelong friends.

She moved to Manhattan, NYC and lived intentionally in the poor areas of town and served at the local missions in the neighborhood. Some of the missions she worked with still exist today, like the Bowery Mission in New York City, founded in 1879. She did not see herself primarily as a hymn writer or poet. She saw herself as a missionary to the urban poor. Aunt Fanny is what the neighborhood people called her.

In 1907, she moved to Connecticut to care for a sick friend. She picked up the cause she left in New York there in Connecticut. On February 12th, 1915, Fanny died of a stroke and prolonged illness that followed it. She was 95 years old. I want to read to you the first verse and chorus from her song, *Saved By Grace* as we consider that moment for Fanny.

Verse 1:

Some day the silver cord will break,

And I no more as now shall sing;

But oh, the joy when I shall wake

Within the palace of the King!

Chorus:

And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story– Saved by grace;
And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story– Saved by grace.

She saw the Lord with open eyes. She saw Him face to face all because of the story--saved by grace.

So here is my final charge for us this morning, in light of Deuteronomy 31 and the life and witness of Fanny Crosby: Sing to the Lord. Praise His name and give Him the glory owed to Him for your life, regardless of what you're facing or going through. Don't let your personal trials or struggles be an excuse for not singing His praises. Singing is one of the things we're made to do. We are worshippers. Singing is one of the ways we express our beliefs and loves. The Bible commands us to sing the praises of the Lord.



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



- **REVIEW**
 - Read **Deuteronomy 31:19-22** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
 - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
 - Additional Scripture:
 - Deuteronomy 32
 - Psalm 66:1-4
 - Psalm 68:4-6
 - Psalm 100:1-2

- Psalm 105:1-2
- Ephesians 5:18-19
- Colossians 3:16

● **REFLECT**

- God instructs Moses to write down a song and teach it to the Israelites as a witness for him. How does the use of a song serve as powerful tools for spiritual memory and community identity today?
- In Deuteronomy 31, God reveals that the Israelites will turn away from him in the future. How does God's foreknowledge of their coming failure and their responsibility to remain faithful influence our understanding of free will and divine sovereignty?
- Fanny Crosby became blind shortly after birth, yet she viewed her blindness as a blessing instead of an obstacle. How does her perspective challenge us?
- Fanny Crosby wrote over 8,000 hymns, many of which remain influential today. What is it about her hymns that has allowed them to endure?
- Despite her prolific contributions, Crosby often chose to remain anonymous or used pseudonyms for her work. How does Crosby's decision to forgo personal recognition reflect her understanding of service and humility?

● **RESPOND**

- What can you learn from Fanny Crosby's life?
- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?

● **MEDITATE**

- Colossians 3:16 – Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

● **MEMORIZE**

- Lamentations 3:37-38 – Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?



- **BUILD UP:** How will you follow Jesus this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him? We have several discipleship opportunities for you to participate in.
 - **MDWK** is a time of education and growth in order to build up the Journey Church body. We offer a handful of intentionally chosen classes that cover a broad range of topics and are taught by quality teachers from within our congregation. Classes are at 6:30p every Wednesday.
 - **TJC Women** seeks to equip women to be rooted in the Word of God and bold in their faith. Our events and small groups focus on letting the gospel shape all spheres of our lives. Gather is the first Saturday of every month.

- **TJC Men** exists to build up men as husbands, fathers, and workers who make disciples in the spheres that God has called them to. The men's ministry meets on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 8:00a.
- **TJC Students** is passionate to see every parent equipped, every leader developed, and every student disciplined into baptized, self-feeding, disciple making followers of Jesus who are letting the gospel shape every sphere of their lives. Our student ministry meets on Wednesday nights from 6:00p-7:30p for MDWK worship and Sunday mornings at 8:30a and 10:00a for small group.
- **TJC Young Adults** exists to equip young adults ages 18 to 29 in becoming passionate followers of Jesus who enter their life on Christ. We do this through intentional relationships, fellowship and worship centered around the gospel. The Fount meets every Tuesday at 7:00p.
- **SEND OUT:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story or the gospel? We have several opportunities for local and foreign missions.
 - **Local opportunities:** Serving international students at Cumberland University, serving the homeless at Compassionate Hands, supporting our local ministries – Reach out to Jeff Long for more information
 - **Foreign opportunities:** 2025 trips to the Philippines, Turkey, Rome, Indonesia, London, and Israel – Reach out to Shawn Casto for more information
- **PRAYER**
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - **Staff** – Timo Serrano
 - **Role** – Facilities Director
 - **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
 - **Pray for our short-term teams**
 - Central Asia Team #2 departing on September 27
 - **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>