

INI

Deuteronomy 32,34-43

Trinity 16 — 20 September 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the first lesson, which was read earlier:

[Then the LORD said:]

See now that I, I am He,

And there is no god beside Me;

It is I who put to death and give life.

I have wounded, and it is I who heal;

And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

⁴⁰ Indeed, I lift up my hand to heaven,
and say, as I live forever,

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: Our text for today comes from the final chapters of Deuteronomy, the Fifth Book of Moses. This chapter, and the one preceding, are Moses' Song to the children of Israel. Part of this song is given by the Lord to Moses to tell and warn God's people. In it, we read of blessing for the believing obedient and cursing for the unbelieving disobedient.

Many critical scholars do not believe that Moses wrote this. They believe that because in part it is based on the form of treaties in the Ancient Near East, it would have been written centuries later.

This view is wrong. They forget that for the first forty years of his life, Moses was raised in the household of the Pharaoh of Egypt, as a

prince of Egypt. In such a setting, Moses would have known full well how such treaties were written and of what they consisted.

Such critics are also wrong because they assume that the words in this chapter are not the words of God, but the words of men who attributed them to God. But they forget that God speaks to men in words and forms that are understandable to them. Thus, God used this form of treaty language to clearly spell out to His people why He had chosen them and what was expected of them.

Critics also feel that Moses could not have written these words because they speak of future events, of how in the future Israel would have fallen away from God and His Word. Critics do not believe in predictions concerning the future.

The critics are again wrong. Leaving aside the idea that God and His prophet do not know the future, if Israel's future performance was based on his past behavior, then it would be entirely reasonable to say that the chances of Israel's falling away from God and into unbelief were pretty good. Sin overtook Israel when it built the golden calf. Sin overtook Israel when it murmured against Moses and against God. Sin overtook Israel when it lusted after foreign gods. Unfortunately, the reality of sin made looking into the future all too easy.

But what is truly wonderful in this song of Moses, is that behind God's promises stands the One in whom all will be fulfilled, that is, His Son, Jesus Christ.

Apart from Christ, there is death. In Christ, however, there is healing and life. There is indeed no god but the true God, and how He reveals Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ.

This brings me to my sermon theme for this morning, "**God Speaks Words Of Death And Life.**" I'll develop this theme in two parts:

- 1) God's Word Of Judgment On Sin Means Death;** and,
- 2) God's Word Of Life In Jesus.**

1) God's Word Of Judgment On Sin Means Death. Today we are familiar with the statute of limitations. That means, for certain crimes, after a certain number of years have passed, prosecution is no longer possible.

Is it like that with God? After a certain number of years, does He forget about sin and forget about things?

God says, "No."

God remembers sin. He says that He remembers and stores these things up, and at the appropriate time He will exact vengeance, and will dole out punishment for sin.

When God's people sin by abandoning Him for false gods, the day of reckoning is in God's hands. The day of "calamity," that is, the day on which punishment will be exacted, is near.

For the sinner and the sinful nation of Israel, that day may come in time or it may come in eternity — but come it will, and of that one may be certain.

God will ask them, "where are your gods, the rock in which you sought refuge?"

Israel would go after false gods, the idols of the nations which surrounded them, idols made of stone, idols made with the hands of men. And not only the idols made of stone, but also the vain philosophies of this age and the empty deceptions of false teaching (see Colossians 2,8).

Will these idols prove to be as durable as the rock out of which they were made? Or rather, will they prove to be only as durable as the hands of flesh which fashioned them or the minds which dreamt them

up?

Before the Lord, however, the hands of sinful flesh are as grass. In the morning it grows, by the evening it withers. It is cut and thrown into the furnace and consumed.

The idols do not drink of the offerings given to them. Only those who make offerings to false gods drink; but in the sight of the Lord, they drink to their everlasting damnation and destruction. One cannot sit at the table of idols and the table of the Lord.

For those who believe that they can pay lip service to God and lip service to idols, in effect hedging their bets as to whom to pray to and in whom to trust, there is no hiding place. The Lord exposes all false worship and rejects those who in one minute pray to Him and in the next pray to an idol, a false god of their own making.

So God makes an oath to Himself. He lifts up His hand to heaven and says that in this same hand lie the punishment for sin: wounding or scourging, and even death itself.

For His people who turn against Him, God clearly says :

then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins. (Leviticus 26,24)

This type of scourging or striking is also used to describe the plagues with which the Lord afflicted the Egyptians. Except for the final plague which killed the first born, the plagues did not slay, but it is probable that by the end many wished they were already dead rather than face further affliction.

And what of the soul who sins? Who not only worships at the shrines of idols, but also oppresses his neighbor, murders, commits adultery, and otherwise any in any way breaks God's Law? God says:

The soul who sins shall die. (Ezekiel 18,4)

For sinful, unbelieving Israel there is no deliverance from the hand of the Lord. There is nothing under heaven or earth which can deliver him from the wrath to come.

But God does give an alternative.

2) God's Word Of Life In Jesus. If God remembers and stores up punishment for sinners, in God's storehouse there is also Someone else. As Paul puts it, of:

... Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 3,2-3)

It is in the promise of a coming Savior that God truly reveals Himself. It is in Christ that God reveals Himself in forgiveness.

When the Lord sees that His people's "strength is gone," that in effect they have hit rock bottom, then it is He Who "will vindicate His people."

God does not leave people in their sin. His condemnation of sin is there to point people to He Who will rescue them from their sin. And so in seeking forgiveness, one may ask:

who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He Who died, yes, rather Who was raised, Who is at the right hand of God, Who intercedes for us. (Romans 8,34)

It is as Job said,

I know that my Redeemer lives. (Job 19,25)

In the place of the false rock of idols, God is the true Rock of Redemption. As Moses says earlier in his song:

For I proclaim the name of the Lord;
Ascribe greatness to our God!
The Rock! His work is perfect;
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He. (Deuteronomy 32,3-4)

He is the Rock Who gave water to Israel in their desert wanderings, and as Paul says:

for they were drinking from a Spiritual Rock which followed them, and this Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10,4)

He is the Rock of our salvation and the Rock on which the Church is built.

He is the Rock, the true God of heaven and earth, and in Christ He gives His heavenly meal to feed His people, the true Body and Blood of His Son. Here at His table He nourishes His people, and He does not share this table with any apart from Christ.

He is the God Who speaks judgment on His Son so that all who are in Him may have life in the face of death, and healing in the place of wounding.

He is the God Who said of His Son:

But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement of our peace was upon Him;
And with His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53,5)

The judgment that should have fallen on us sinners, who like sheep have wandered away, have fallen on God's Servant, His Son, Jesus.

What is this healing? It is nothing less than the forgiveness of sins.

As Jeremiah says:

Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed;
Save me, and I will be saved. (Jeremiah 17,14)

Here and elsewhere in Scripture, the healing that God promises is first and foremost a spiritual healing that comes through the forgiveness He gives in the stripes of His Son.

Jesus is the One on Whom the sentence of death for the sins of the world was spoken, so that through His death we might have life. Jesus is the Lamb of God, the final Paschal sacrifice, Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1,29).

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus is the One Who delivers us from the left hand of God, the hand of wrath, and places us in His kingdom of Grace, God's right hand. He is the One who teaches us to pray: "Deliver us from evil."

Deliver us from every evil of body, soul, property and honor.

Deliver us from the evil of unbelief.

Deliver us from the evil of thinking we can be double-minded in our service to You.

Deliver us from the evil of adding or subtracting from Your Word.

Deliver us from every evil of body and soul.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus is the one who has delivered us from the kingdom of the darkness of sin, of death, and the devil, and brought us into His "marvelous light" (1 Peter 2,7).

Conclusion: Christ said rightly that the Scriptures give life and that they testify of Him.

Apart from Jesus, however, people stand under the judgment of sin, under God's wrath, from which there is no statute of limitations. The wages of sin are death. It was true in the days of Moses. It was true in the days of Jesus. It is true today. There is no statute of limitations.

But in God's storehouse of treasures is the forgiveness of sins which Jesus has won for us through His death and resurrection.

Only in Jesus is the true knowledge of God to be revealed, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, He is revealed in promise. In the New, He is revealed as God in the flesh, come not to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might be saved.

In Him, the punishment and chastisement for sin has been paid in full, for He died once for all.

In Him is our sin healed, forgiven and forgotten

He is our strong Rock and our Deliverer. He delivers from every evil of body and soul so that when our last hour has come, He may give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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