

7. Not ours, but His

December 9, 2010

I am sure that if you are thinking fairly, you would agree with me on the point I am about to bring up:

When the life we live goes well, we have a tendency to think that it has something to do with us. But it starts to get snags in the journey of our lives, we also have a tendency to think that God somehow is responsible for all those snags.

Moses is reminding the Israelites that they are going to go into the Promised Land where everything is provided by the goodness of the Lord. But this prosperity has nothing to do with them and their own righteousness, rather it has everything to do with the Lord's mercy. And he also tells them to be sensitive to the leading of the Lord with complete obedience.

I am sure that you remember what we studied last Thursday night Bible study: The blessings from the Lord are directly connected with our obedience to His commands.

A. THE GIANTS IN THE LAND

Deuteronomy 9:1-3 "Hear, O Israel: You are to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, cities great and fortified up to heaven, 2 a people great and tall, the descendants of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you heard it said, 'Who can stand before the descendants of Anak?' 3 Therefore understand today that the Lord your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you.

As the giants in the Promised Land scared the living daylights out of the Israelites, we are often scared silly by the difficulties in our lives – financial shortfall, job situation, family problems, marital issues, to name a few.

Sometimes these giants completely overwhelm us and we cannot see any head way. When we think that we barely missed a blow from one difficulty, we get hit by a sucker punch from another difficulty.

How can we stay safe from these attacks of our enemies? What can we do? Nothing, because we are absolutely no match for the onslaughts of our enemy – the devil – with our own strength.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

But the devil is no match with our God. God has not seen His match yet and never will.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

As He promised and assured the Israelites that there was no need to fear the future because He would go before them to help them defeat their enemies. But He would work with them, not without them; nor would He do it in spite of them, because they had to be obedient and respect His laws.

It is the same for us. God would work with us, not without us. However, He would not do anything for us when we are against Him and disobedient to Him. Yet, He will meet all His children's needs because He is faithful to His own promises.

2 Timothy 2:13 *If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*

B. NOT OURS, BUT HIS

Deuteronomy 9:4-6 Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land'; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you. 5 It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 6 Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.

Israel's temptation toward pride did not come in something they would actually say. Like that the majority of Christians who have been around churches for sometime will not utter self-glorifying phrases blatantly such as, "Oh yes, I am the best and with my own hands, I've accomplished it." But in our hearts where no one can see, we often boast about the results instead of giving it all to the Lord.

The same idea is expressed in an old Roman Catholic teaching that dying men should pray, "Lord, join my righteousness with Christ's righteousness" as if the two together could accomplish something. Instead, we look to the righteousness of Jesus alone.

This is a preview of salvation by grace through faith, in which we cannot think that it is our righteousness that has obtained it. Instead, it is the righteousness we have received in Jesus Christ.

With this in mind, Moses reminds them not to think in their hearts that it was because of their righteousness that the Lord has given them the land.

C. ONE REBELLION AFTER ANOTHER

From 9:7-10:11, Moses lists the rebellions of the Israelites in the wilderness, not necessarily in chronological order. What is the reason for this list? Moses was addressing a new generation, but they had the same tendency to stray away from the Lord and rebel against Him like their parents did. You may say, "The same song, the second verse."

Deuteronomy 9:10 Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly.

Can you imagine seeing the tablets written by God Himself? I would love to see them. But we have the whole book that was written by God through His people – the Bible. In Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8:

Hebrews 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The Lord puts His law in our hearts that we may want to do what He wants, not what we want.

Impatience and unbelief prompts terrible results in our lives. What the Israelites did at Mount Sinai was a case in point. Moses had been on the mountain with the Lord for forty days and nights. During his absence, his brother Aaron was in charge and he should have been strong and diligent in the Lord, but he'd rather listen to the people in the camp. When they were discontent with the Lord, he tried to appease them by making a golden calf. Never underestimate the importance of spiritual leadership that encourages obedience to the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 9:15 So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands.

The burning fires on Mount Sinai were physical representation of the glory of God and His holy presence. The sight of a burning mountain is not something you can easily ignore if you are staying down at the valley. You will see it and you will notice it. While the fire was still burning on the mountain, the people in the camp were busy worshiping this worthless idol golden calf which couldn't do a thing.

In many occasions, we can be so spiritually dull and insensitive to the Lord that we continuously go on with our carnal pursuit while the Holy Spirit is in presence in our midst – in each born-again Christian's heart individually as well as while we are gather together in church assembly corporately.

Deuteronomy 9:17 Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes.

We all know that Moses had an anger issue. We see his anger flared up in three occasions:

- 1) In the beginning, He killed an Egyptian because he thought that the Hebrews would respect him and follow him.
- 2) This is the second occasion.
- 3) When the Israelites arrived at Kadesh, they couldn't find water. Again, they did what they did best – complain. Moses, in his outburst of anger, struck the rock when he was told to speak to it. This disobedience cost him the entrance to the Promised Land.

But throwing the two tablets down was instructed by the Lord, in my opinion. It was a dramatic presentation of the broken covenant between the Lord and the Israelites. They could expect nothing but fiery indignation and severe justice from Him.

D. INTERCESSORY PRAYERS

Deuteronomy 9:25 "Thus I prostrated myself before the Lord; forty days and forty nights I kept prostrating myself, because the Lord had said He would destroy you.

We have to admire Moses as the leader of God's people. He had already spent forty days on the mountain. Now he spent another 40 days and night in fasting and praying – interceding on behalf of them who often wanted to stone him to death.

Some unbelievers would say, "Eighty days and nights of fasting is impossible." Of course, it is impossible for a man to do it with his own strength, but would it be still impossible with God? Absolutely not. After all, God created heaven and earth. Can He keep Moses alive during this eighty days and nights of fasting? You think?

E. THE SECOND PAIR OF TABLETS

Deuteronomy 10:1-5 "At that time the Lord said to me, 'Hew for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain and make yourself an ark of wood. 2 And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke; and you shall put them in the ark.' 3 So I made an ark of acacia wood, hewed two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain, having the two tablets in my hand. 4 And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which the Lord had spoken to you in the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me. 5 Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, just as the Lord commanded me."

In my opinion, this is a great illustration of the inspiration of God's Word. Though He didn't literally write the Scriptures with His own hand like the first pair of tablets, He did perfectly guide the minds and hands of the writers, so that the Scriptures are inspired by Him.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

F. THE FIVE ESSENCES OF THE LAW

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"

Did you notice these five imperative words? Fear, walk, love, serve, and keep. We cannot ignore any one of these and think that we are doing everything right in following the Lord.

1) The fear of the Lord comes from our reverence to His majesty and presence, but not in fear of destruction by Him.

2) The whole Scripture tells us that the life of faith is compared to a 'walk' with the Lord.

3) The central element in these five imperative words is love for the Lord. How is it possible to have fear of the Lord and the love for the Lord at the same time? It can be explained simply by having the love for Him first. When we love the Lord with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies, we fear that we might bring disgrace to His name due to our carnal characters.

4) The servanthood of God's people is a natural side product of our effort to please Him. True servanthood in the Lord is not burdensome, rather a pure joy, privilege, honor, and delight. Anyone who does not serve the Lord is the one who robs one's own blessings.

5) Keeping the commandments of the Lord is not a bunch of "Dos and Don'ts" to the true followers of God. They want to do it, because they love Him, want to bring honor to Him, and to please Him.

G. NOT PHYSICAL, BUT SPIRITUAL

Deuteronomy 10:16 Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

God chose Israel because He loved them, and because of that love, He made a covenant with them to be their God and bless them. The seal of that covenant was circumcision, given first to Abraham in Genesis 17 and commanded to be practiced on all his male descendants.

So important was circumcision to the Jews that they spoke of the Gentiles as “the uncircumcised.” But Israel so magnified this physical ritual much that they even forgot the spiritual reality, which circumcision marked them as God’s people with spiritual privileges and responsibilities.

Circumcision wasn’t a guarantee that every Jewish man was going to heaven. Unless there was a change in the heart with faith in God, the person didn’t belong to the Lord. That’s why Moses exhorted them to let God “operate” on their hearts and do a lasting spiritual work (see Deut. 30:6), a message that was repeated by the prophets in Jeremiah 4: and Ezekiel 44 and the apostle Paul in Rom. 4:9-12.

Romans 4:9-12 Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. 10 How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Unfortunately, this same spiritual blindness is with us today, because many people believe that baptism, confirmation, church membership, or participation in communion automatically guarantees their salvation. As meaningful as those things are, the Christian’s assurance and seal of salvation isn’t a physical ceremony but a spiritual work of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

H. APPLICATIONS

- 1) When we pray only for the thing consistent with God’s glory, we have our hearts set on the right things.
- 2) Impatience and unbelief prompts terrible results in our lives.
- 3) Fear the Lord; walk with Him; love Him; serve Him; and keep His commandments.