

Sermon – 13/11/2005 pm

All Glory to God

Study Text: Deuteronomy 9:1-6

I did it myself. I did it my way. This is the boast of people today. Look at me; look at what I have done. From birth we think like this and we are encouraged to think like this. It is nothing new of course. It has been there since Adam and Eve first said to God ‘we will do things our own way’. God put them in a beautiful garden; he gave them all they needed. They were able to obey God – unlike us today – but they chose not to. They wanted to do things their own way and ignore God.

Through Moses the Lord announced he was about to bring his chosen people into the land of Canaan. A small band of ex-slaves would invade and attack heavily fortified cities. They would destroy the giants who lived there. Would these people give the glory to God or would they take the glory to themselves? Would they acknowledge that it was only with God’s help that they won the victory? Moreover would they presume that God helped them because they were good or righteous people, fully deserving of his help?

Who cares you might say? After they had won the victory let whoever wants take the glory – what does it matter? It matters to God. Even before they won Moses warned them not to think they did it themselves or that God was on their side because they were righteous.

Jeremiah was a prophet some 800 years after Moses. He also warned the people not to boast in their own righteousness or anything else.

*Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom
Let not the mighty man glory in his might
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches
But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and know me,
That I am the Lord exercising lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in all the earth, for in these I delight says the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23, 24).*

And 700 years later still the apostle Paul had to condemn the Jews for trusting in their own righteousness (Romans 10:3). And today, 2000 years after Paul do we still need to hear the same message?

Divine Power

Forty years before this day on which Moses spoke, the Lord commanded the people to go in and possess the land. Moses sent out spies to get information for devising a strategy for battle. But they came back full of fear because of the fortified cities and the giants (1:28). Fear overcame faith. The people refused to go up in obedience to the Lord.

Moses reminded this new generation of that tragic day (1:19f). He told them again and again ‘the Lord is going before you, the Lord will bring you into this good land, do *not be afraid* (7:18) – *for the Lord your God is a great and awesome God* (7:21), *he is a consuming fire* (9:3)’. God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. There is no greater power in all creation than that of our God. This claim is not without substance for he is the God who created all other powers. This claim is not without proof for he demonstrated his power before the greatest man on earth – the King of Egypt.

He who goes over before you is a consuming fire (9:3). Fire is the most devastating means of destruction for it consumes all before it. Wind and rain flatten things and cause great devastation but

the materials remain. Fire consumes – in a few moments it swallows up whatever is before it. What once existed no longer exists.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). He was writing in the context of judgment, the removal things that are made. Peter tells us that the heavens and the earth as we know them are reserved for fire (II Peter 3:7). On the Day of the Lord they will pass away, they will be burned up.

Jesus demonstrated this same divine power that Moses was speaking of. He turned water into wine, he stilled the storm, and he walked on water showing his power over the created order. He had power over kings and rulers – no one could harm him till his hour had come (John 8:59, 19:11). But his battle was not against earthly rulers – it was the spiritual rulers behind them that he came to conquer (John 18:36). Do you know the omnipotence of God?

You are to cross over the Jordan today and go in to possess the land of the Canaanites (9:1). The Lord you God was giving them this land as their own possession. Why? Why was the Lord giving this land to his people? Because they were good and deserved it! Not at all! Moses tells of three reasons why.

Divine Judgment

These were wicked nations (9:4, 5). The Canaanites were wicked, idolatrous people, and had been so for a long time. God was going to use Israel to punish these nations, to destroy them because of their sin. The Lord had announced this plan to Abraham in Genesis 15:16. Now through Moses he tells his people of this judgment. *You go in and possess their land because of the wickedness of these nations (9:5).*

The Lord judged Pharaoh by divine power. He would judge the Canaanites through the children of Israel as agents of his divine power. Moreover Israel was warned they would likewise be judged if they did not obey the Lord (8:20). Plagues, dividing of the sea, and war – the Lord was judging his enemies. How amazing that God told Moses, he told his people all that he was doing. Here we have an insight into the mind of Almighty God. How awesome, how terrible! We have knowledge the wicked need to hear don't you think?

King Herod was on his throne giving an oration when he suddenly dropped dead. Poor fellow had a heart attack people might have said. By divine inspiration Luke tells us that an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give glory to God (Acts 12:23). Herod had been harassing some in the church. He had killed James the brother of John and had seized Peter. The Lord raises some up, and puts others down (Luke 1:52).

Is not the same God working in the same way in the world today? What was the end of the wicked ruler of Germany last century? What about others who set themselves up in opposition to God? Is God not judging even as he is saving many through the preaching of the gospel?

Divine Promise

And that he may fulfil the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (9:5). This is the second reason why the Lord was bringing his people into the land. He was fulfilling his promise. It was the 'promised' land. The promise was given over four hundred years before but was still valid. God had not forgotten. His promise had not failed. He had not changed his mind.

For any business to run effectively it is imperative to have a business plan. What would it be like if you went in to work one day and the boss said 'we are making bread today so here is what you must do', but after a few days when you go in to work he says 'Oh the bread is no good, we are making chocolates today? It would be stressful not knowing what you might be doing the next day.

Some Christians think God is like such a boss. Why? Is it that they like stress or is it that they cannot trust God? They are never sure if they are saved or not, they are never sure if God wants them to be in this job, or this church. And so they are always up or down, they are always going to new church. They are never settled.

But God does not keep changing his mind. God is not in the business of playing games with his people. When he makes a promise he fulfils that promise – even if it takes 400 years! And still Peter could write *the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise* (II Peter 3:9).

Do you find comfort and strength in knowing you have such a God, a heavenly Father who does not change his mind, who does not break his promises – ever! You will find even greater comfort and strength when you know what his promises are, the promises he has made under the new covenant in the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. You can find all those promises in your Bible.

Divine Grace

Understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff necked people (9:6). It was not because they were in any way deserving of this land that the Lord was giving it to them. It was purely because of God's grace. This is the third reason why they were being given this land.

Of course the grace of God was behind his promise, but Moses wants to make it very clear to these people that they were not only *the least of all peoples* when he chose them (7:7), but that they had no righteousness of their own through which they were deserving of God's favour. They were neither righteous nor upright in heart, but in fact were a stubborn, stiff-necked people. This might not seem a very nice thing to say but it was the truth. It was the truth about them and it is the truth about you.

When you look at yourself you might think 'Oh I am not so bad – plenty of people worse than me. I can understand why the Lord chose to bless me and not that no-hoper down the road'. When you look at some person you might say 'Oh he is such a nice fellow. He is kind, honest and so sincere. He would make a fine Christian'. Some would even tell you he is a Christian already but does not know it. Have you thought such things? Have you heard such thoughts expressed?

The apostle Paul knew the law backwards and was zealous for the law. Such an upright young man – he was just a step away from the kingdom of God some would say. He was indeed only a step away, but it was a step in the opposite direction. It was a step he took under divine conviction. He would later say that all his zeal and self-righteousness was like dung.

Is this not what God saw when he looked on Paul also – dung? Is it not what he saw when looked on the stubborn and rebellious hearts of the children of Israel? Is it not what he sees when he looks on your heart – unless and until you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ?

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon