

Holy God

HN 18/09/05pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 7, Isaiah 54

Study Text: Deuteronomy 7:9-15

Sing Psalms: 100, 139:1-6, 139:7-24, 136:21-26

‘Sure I will be there at eight o’clock’ he said. Eight o’clock came and went and he did not show up. When contacted he said ‘Oh something else came up and I could not make it’. This was not the first time he had acted in this way. In fact it happened every time he was asked. He was not trustworthy, his word meant nothing. It was impossible to keep up a working relationship with this man.

Faithfulness must be present in any relationship. The closer the relationship the more important it is. Faithfulness can be regarded as the measure of one’s commitment to the other person in a relationship. We speak of love, but love must be demonstrated by faithfulness.

Faithfulness is not easy to find is it? Where can we find one who is faithful? A husband or a wife? A mother toward her child? ‘Can a woman forget her nursing child’ asked the prophet. ‘Surely she may forget’ is the reply (Isaiah 49:15). Sin has so corrupted the human heart that true faithfulness cannot be found in it.

Where then can we find true faithfulness? The prophet reminds us in the words of the Lord – *surely..I will not forget you* (Isaiah 49:15). The Lord your God is faithful. He is faithful to his covenant promises. The Lord will never fail to uphold the terms of the covenant he imposed upon himself.

Faithful Not Fickle

Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God (7:9). He is the only true God. He is the faithful God. The gods of the nations were neither true nor faithful. They were of course created by men, the product of their own imagination. Such gods are like men, they are not faithful but fickle. Such gods were not only represented in grotesque idols and carved images but they were perverse, immoral and capricious.

Moses told the people they were *a holy people to the Lord your God*. God chose them and declared them to be holy. God himself is the holy God. *You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy* (Leviticus 19:2). God is holy. He is set apart; he is not part of this creation. ‘God is Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth (Shorter Catechism 4). Holiness is defined by the very nature of God.

The infinite and eternal Creator made himself known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He made himself known to the children of Israel as the Holy One of Israel and as their Redeemer. He set his love on them and delivered them out of bondage, and made a covenant with them at Horeb. In

this covenant of love he declared ‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’. *He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you* (31:8).

This covenant governed the relationship between God and his people. God was faithful to his covenant promises. God is faithful to his word. He was absolutely trustworthy in upholding the terms of the covenant he imposed upon himself. God is holy. He is the faithful God who does not fail to keep his promises. By this faithfulness he will maintain his honour and his glory before the nations.

Covenant Love

God keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commandments (7:9). Some translate ‘covenant of love’. The word translated ‘mercy’ or ‘love’ here is *chesed* a word describing the special love of God for his chosen people. It is found over 240 times in the Old Testament, most frequently in the Psalms. This is not sentimental love. This is not love related to anything lovely in the recipient. It refers to God’s love under the terms of his covenant.

How enduring is this love of God? For a thousand generations! That is a long time! It is steadfast love; it is unending love. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. *O give thanks to the God of gods for his love/mercy endures forever* (Psalm 136). The Psalmist wants us to be very sure about this love of God as he included it in the refrain of this Psalm. Are you sure about God’s steadfast covenant love for you?

The people for their part were to obey or keep the commandments, the statutes and the judgments which God gave them. He demanded holy living and exclusive worship. They were his people; they bore his name. Through them God would be honoured among the nations. Indeed the nations would see this holy people and desire to be like them (4:6). They would come to Israel from all the nations seeking the truth and the knowledge of salvation.

The people declared they would be faithful to the terms of the covenant. ‘All that the Lord says we will do’ they said (5:27). But did they? Were they obedient? Were they faithful? No – before Moses could get down off the mountain they had made themselves an idol and started worshipping it (Exodus 32). The wrath of God burned against these unfaithful people and he was going to destroy them. But Moses interceded, pleading with the Lord on the basis of the covenant – and *the Lord relented from the harm which he said he would do to his people* (Exodus 32:14).

‘The wonderful fact about the Lord is that although by reason of Israel’s neglect and breach of covenant he might have been released from his obligations to Israel, yet he continued faithful’. The Lord could justly have destroyed these people who broke covenant through idolatry – but he remembered his covenant love/mercy. ‘The entire history of Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel can be summarized in terms of *chesed* or covenant love. It is the one permanent element in the flux of covenantal history’.

For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed
But My kindness shall not depart from you

Nor shall my covenant of peace be removed
says the Lord who has mercy on you. (Isaiah 54:10)

What may well be an early Christian creed is found in II Timothy 2:11-13. It reads in part *if we are faithless he (God) remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself*. This is an interesting statement which must be seen in context of course. In the context we might have expected 'if we are faithless, he will be also be faithless'. But God cannot be faithless – God is always and eternally faithful. God cannot break the covenant he made with us. It was made in the blood his only Son Jesus Christ. His covenant love endures for ever.

In love he will discipline his faithless children (Hebrew 12). He will do all that it takes to restore backsliders, to rehabilitate the disobedient, those unfaithful to his covenant in Jesus Christ – for his own names sake and for his glory.

Human Hate

The opposite of love is hate. Those who hate God, those who totally reject his love, **h** will repay, he will destroy. This text, along with many others, refutes any claims of universalism. How can it be claimed that in the end all will be saved when the Scripture says God will repay those who hate him and destroy them. God is holy. The kingdom of God is a holy kingdom. Those who hate God have no place in his kingdom. There is no inconsistency in God – there is no conflict. God will bless those who love him and destroy those who hate him.

Jesus said he *who is not with me is against me* (Matthew 12:30). Those who speak against the Holy Spirit, those who attribute the works of God to the devil, will not be forgiven. The wrath of God remains on them; the wrath of God remains on those who reject his Son – they shall not see eternal life (John 3:36).

Look again at the creed in II Timothy 2. If we are faithless, if we fail to keep the terms of the covenant God has made with us there is forgiveness, for God is faithful to the covenant. But those who deny him, those who reject his Son, those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit, such people God will deny, they remain as objects of his wrath.

Blessings

If you love me you will obey my commands said Jesus (John 14:23). Moses said covenant children must love the Lord and obey his commandments. In his covenant love the Lord will bless his covenant people. Then it shall come to pass, when the covenant is being kept, that the Lord *will bless you and multiply you* (7:13).

Under the old covenant these blessings were tangible. Just as the Creator commanded man to go forth and multiply, so the Redeemer now promises increase. Fertility was important in those days – it was a mark of blessing. The Canaanites vainly worshipped fertility gods, but worship of the true God would not be in vain. The land would yield its increase – from their flocks and herds to their crops and vines, and their very families; they would see the blessing of the Lord.

There would be no barrenness. Barrenness had marred their life up till now – Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel all experienced barrenness until the Lord opened their womb. Fertility and fruitfulness would characterise life in the Promised Land for the chosen people of God.

Along with this fruitfulness the Lord would take away all sickness (7:15). They probably suffered various diseases in Egypt, but the reference here is to the different plagues which the Lord sent upon Egypt (28:27, 60). They saw and experienced a lot of sickness and suffering back then but would see this no more in the Promised Land.

Again this may reflect life before the Fall. And looking ahead into the new heaven and the new earth there will be no more sickness, no more pain, and no more crying (Revelation 21:4). But we are not there yet. Like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we look forward to the heavenly city, the heavenly country.

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