

Sermon – 10/09/2006 pm

Song of Moses – Faithless People

Study Text: Deuteronomy 32:15-25

Obesity is a word we hear a lot about these days. It is perhaps the greatest danger facing the western world we are told. We are literally eating ourselves to an early death. All manner of diets, exercise and now surgical remedies are recommended, but the problem keeps growing. Yet man remains proud that he is control of his own body and in control of his own destiny!

Why has obesity become such a problem? It is not a problem in the villages of India or Africa. It was not a problem here fifty years ago. The ‘baby boomer’ generation has had it all! Our parents, who faced hard times during the depression and the War, gave us everything. They wanted their children to have a good life. So this generation enjoyed those good things, but in the process turned away from the faith of their fathers. They went after the things of the world and continue to do so. Obesity is the result.

In a similar manner God brought his people into the good land of Canaan – a land of milk and honey, wheat and wine. They enjoyed rich blessings from the hand of the Lord their God. He kept them as the apple of his eye. *But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked, you grew fat and you grew thick, you are obese (32:15).*

Sin of Israel

Moses was about to die when he wrote this song. It was not just a song of praise to God, although that is how it begins – *Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock*. The song includes a call to remember God’s great and gracious work of redemption. But the song goes on to describe what will happen when Israel enters into their own land. They would forsake the God who made them, and gave them health, wealth and peace on every side. Such content is certainly a far cry from popular worship songs of today!

Jeshurun refers to Israel. It is a term found only in Deuteronomy 32 and 33 and Isaiah 44. It literally means ‘upright one’ or ‘one keeping the law’. It is somewhat ironic in that this nation which should have been law keeping is the very one accused of being a ‘law breaker’. The nation chosen by God for his glory, would soon suffer defeat at the hands of their enemies. The nation that was supposed to be a light to the world would soon become a nation of reproach and darkness.

The people of Israel turned their backs on their God. They forgot the Lord who saved them and gave them all they had. *They forsook the God who made them and scornfully esteemed the Rock of their salvation (32:15)*. In their prosperity these people said ‘we did it ourselves; by our own efforts we became rich’. *Give me neither poverty nor riches, said the wise man Agur, lest I be full and deny you and say ‘who is the Lord?’ (Proverbs 30:9)*. Do we see such wisdom displayed today?

Turning away from God means turning to other gods. Israel forsook the Lord their God to follow foreign gods. This is always the case. We are spiritual beings compelled to worship someone or something. In the days of Moses different nations had different gods. The gods

were nation specific. You may find this a strange concept but it is still around today. Not every nation has freedom of religion as we do.

A man once told me that the land of India was a Hindu land. His gods belonged to the very ground of that place. In India only the Hindu religion should be allowed he said. We must be careful not to start thinking this way about Christianity. Our God is God of all the nations and we must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the nations. We must not be simply defending ourselves in this nation.

People who do not worship the true God worship other gods. Jesus told the Jews who claimed God as their Father, but rejected Jesus, that they were actually children of the devil (John 8). They were devil worshippers. There are those who bow down before grotesque idols they have made and there are those who follow sophisticated man-made philosophies. But it all amounts to the same thing – worshipping other gods.

The devil can take many forms and his worshippers can worship in many ways – unlike worship of the true God. God must be worshipped in spirit and truth. He does not look for sacrifice or outward symbols and performances.

The people of Israel would worship other gods, new gods, gods their fathers had not even heard of. This turning to other gods may not be sudden; it may be slow and subtle. It may take a generation or two. Parents enjoying the riches of God's provision would start to take these things for granted. They would get busy increasing their riches and fail, to teach their children as Moses told them. Without being taught the word of God the children would be vulnerable to other gods that promised to satisfy the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (I John 2:16).

I read an anecdote recently about a father sending his son to Sunday School. As he sat in his chair reading the Sunday paper he said to his son 'Turn off the TV and get ready for Sunday School'. 'Daddy aren't you going with me?' 'No I'm not going with you, but I want you to hurry up and get ready'. 'Daddy did you go to Sunday School when you were a little boy like me'. 'Certainly I did. I went every Sunday' said the father. Said the little fellow as he walked away sadly, 'I bet it won't do me any good either'.

Divine Indictment

How will God respond when his people turn their backs on him and go after other gods? Will he say 'as long as you are happy, I am happy'? We hear such foolishness from some parents these days. Then when their children get into trouble, when they get onto drugs or in trouble with the police, they throw up their arms in horror. 'How can this happen to me, what did I do to deserve this' they say.

No, God does not ignore his children when they rebel. God is never passive saying 'I can do nothing; they are beyond me'. No, God is always active; he is always in sovereign control. He will punish them for their sin, for their disobedience and disdain. *When the Lord saw it he spurned them, because of the provocation of his sons and daughters. They were children in whom is no faith* (32:19, 20). God would remove his hand of blessing, he would cease providing for them and protecting them.

He will punish them, firstly because he loves them and is jealous for them. Some refer to this as tough love, love that hurts in order to heal. The parents of a NZ youth took this approach towards their rebellious son. They refused to keep on posting bail whenever he was arrested. They hoped a time in prison would reform him. He was murdered before he got to prison. We might reflect on what Moses commanded for a rebellious son in Deuteronomy 21.

Secondly God will punish them as covenant breakers. God is not only loving but also just. God must act with justice. He cannot allow his commands to be broken with impunity. We all have a sense of fairness and hate partiality – except when we benefit. But God shows no partiality. He is utterly just. The people therefore would be punished by God as law breakers.

Thirdly, God was provoked to jealous anger when they worshipped other gods. Israel provoked the Lord to jealousy by what is not god; they moved him to anger by their foolish idols. So *God said I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation (32:21)*. These people who trusted in a ‘no-god’ would find a ‘no-people’ overtaking them in divine judgment.

Hosea called the third child of his wife Gomer ‘Lo-ammi’, meaning not my people. The message to adulterous Israel over six centuries after Moses was ‘you are not my people, and I will not be your God (Hosea 1:9)’. God would cut them off from their inheritance and give it to another nation. The Assyrians overran Israel (the Northern Kingdom) in 722BC.

When God sent his Son Jesus into this world he was rejected by this same people. He came unto his own but his own did not receive him. Did God ignore this rejection? No. He sent men to proclaim salvation to other nations. As the apostle Paul took this gospel to the Gentiles he saw this as provoking the Jews to jealousy, in the same way that Moses spoke of in this song (*cf. 32:21 and Romans 11:14*).

Is the Lord provoking our nation to jealousy by those who are not his people? We are confronted today by religions that our parents had never even heard of. Why is this? What is our response?

The Sentence

Blessings and curses were clearly set out under the terms of the covenant-blessings if they obeyed and curses if they disobeyed (see ch. 27, 28). This song sets out the curses that God would send upon his people when they broke his covenant. He would send disease, famine and destruction. *I will heap disasters on them* said the Lord (32:23).

The people would suffer greatly at the hand of the Lord for their rebellion and apostasy. In the end he would send a foreign army to destroy their nation and scatter them. In exile they would have their fill of other gods and idol worship. In their despair they would cry out to the Lord, the God of their fathers. How much will we see of the abomination of idol worship and foreign gods in our society before we start turning back to the Lord?

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