

God Blesses the Land

Call to Worship: Psalm 111:1-6

1st Scripture: 2 Samuel 21:1-9

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 21:10-14

Hymn #129- *Fairest Lord Jesus*

Hymn #109- *This is My Father's World*

Hymn Insert- *Blessed be Your Name*

Introduction:

We saw last time that, at some point, during the reign of David, there was an unrelenting famine in the land, which continued for three years strong. Obviously concerned, David inquires of the Lord, and finds that this famine was a divine curse, put upon the Promised Land because of King Saul's sin against the Gibeonites. In violation of the covenant, which Joshua and the elders of Israel had formerly made with the Gibeonites, Saul had attacked and massacred many of the Gibeonites because of his misguided, pride-driven zeal for Israel and Judah.

And so, God, in accordance with His own preordained purposes, brought forth this national guilt, incurred by Saul, into the reign of David, to be dealt with accordingly. David then, humbly went to the Gibeonites, and sought to rectify the situation, by submitting himself to whatever they deemed acceptable as an atonement. Highlighting their own integrity concerning the matter, the Gibeonites sought no monetary compensation, and had no desire to see any Israelites suffer for what Saul had initiated. Instead, they requested that David deliver seven of Saul's descendants over to the Gibeonites, so that they could hang them in Gibeah (Saul's hometown), and thereby, seek the Lord's blessing on the land. This was agreeable to David, who then took Saul's two sons (by way of his concubine Rizpah), along with the five sons of Merab (Saul's daughter), and delivered them over to the Gibeonites to be hung.

We have already sought to lay a lot of groundwork, explaining all that had happened here, especially addressing questions related to the timing and design of God, in dealing with this matter, at this time and in this way. And last time, we considered a handful of applications from verses 1-9, which I thought could benefit us, before moving on to verses 10 and following. And so, this morning, we move on then, examining a few events that ultimately lead to God, once again, blessing the Promised Land.

I. Rizpah's Noble Acts

Following the hanging of seven of Saul's descendants, we are here told that Rizpah the daughter of Aiah; that is Saul's concubine, who was the mother of two of those who had been hung, had gone out to where the bodies were hung, and set up a nearby camp. And she did this, for the purpose of driving away any birds that would attempt to eat the hung corpses by day, or any beasts that would attempt to eat them by night. And she did this, for as long as the bodies were hung, until David had the assurance of God's blessing on the land, confirmed by the removing of the present famine, and in God's sending of rain.

And so, Rizpah suffered through the elements, for the purpose of keeping the bodies of her two sons, and the five sons of Merab, from being dishonored. Historically, and more importantly, biblically, honoring the corpses of the dead has been right and proper, in the sight of God and men. And, in fact, it was a sign of great dishonor and even judgment, when bodies were left unburied, exposed to the elements and wild beasts, so as to be abused, torn and eaten, as if they were mere pieces of meat and useless shells. The value of a human life, in the sight of God and men, was not only shown by the way that the living were treated, but also, the dead.

Listen to just a few verses that confirm this:

1) In Deuteronomy, chapter 28, some of you may recall the recording of blessings and cursings, which were given to Israel, describing the ways in which God would deal with them in accordance with their persistent obedience or disobedience. And the curses given, actually go beyond what would happen to the persistent unrepentant and disobedient Israelites, in their living, and carry over to the shameful way that they would be treated, after their dying.

In verses 25-26, we are told, "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten them away." Here, as a part of the recorded curses of our Lord, against an unrepentant Israel, there was the added dread of them not receiving a proper burial, but rather, their being ingested by animals, with no one to chase the animals away. Again, the whole notion of such treatment of an individual's corpse was hideous and dreadful, devaluing the life that once filled it.

In fact, when David was preparing to fight the giant, Goliath, the same shameful curse was pronounced against David, by Goliath, and then, in return, against the whole Philistine army, by David.

In 1 Samuel 17:44, Goliath states to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field," and part of David's response, given in verse 46, was, "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." Again, the whole idea of being shamed and dishonored is presented in such threats.

Isaiah and Jeremiah also use this type of language to describe the judgment, which God would bring upon those peoples, who have rebelled against Him (Ethiopia, Judah... etc).

And so, needless to say, as Saul's seven descendants had hung, because of Saul's wicked acts against the Gibeonites, Rizpah sought to prevent their corpses from being further shamed by the incurred judgment.

And after God brings forth rain and a successful harvest for Israel, David takes notice of Rizpah, and meets her noble perseverance with kindness and compassion.

II. Saul and His Descendants Receive a Proper Burial

David could very easily have left Saul's descendants alone, to remain shamed, dishonored and unburied, but for the sake of Rizpah, he moves ahead and grants them a proper burial.

In fact, David goes even further to bring an honorable, overall closure for Saul and his family. He retrieves Saul and his son Jonathan's bones from the people of Jabesh Gilead, on the east side of the Jordan, where they were buried, after the men of Jabesh Gilead had stolen them from the Philistines, who had shamefully hung them on the wall at Beth Shan. Up to this point, David had left their remains in Jabesh Gilead, but now, he had brought them back, and with the remains of these seven men, who were just hung, David had them properly buried in the tomb of Saul's father, Kish, in the territory of Benjamin, where Saul's family and tribe were from.

And so, as a means of especially showing honor to Rizpah, who had done so much to maintain the honor of Saul's seven, lifeless descendants, David brought about a proper and honorable closure for Saul's house.

III. God Blesses the Land

Finally, as a final reflection on this unique event, we are told that God had removed the curse, and had heeded the prayer for the land. The atonement made by David, consisting of the hanging of seven of Saul's descendants, had appeased both the Gibeonites and God. And once again, God blessed the land. The restraint of famine was removed and the blessing of God, once again, fell upon His people. And by the end of this sobering process, the holiness of God was vindicated, in the presence of all parties involved.

IV. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Having worked through the remainder of this section, brethren, let us now conclude our time this morning, by considering a few remaining, relevant applications:

1) First brethren, perhaps contrary to the way in which our American culture views death in general (especially from an evolutionary standpoint), let us recognize that the Bible does address the proper and honorable way, in which the dead ought to be treated. In other words, as we have seen here in our text, and as we see, in the Bible in general, there is a right, proper and honorable way to handle the deceased. Now, obviously, I would hope, that all of us would be repulsed by the whole notion of seeing the human body to be nothing more than a shell, so much so, that we would have little or no concern about simply dumping bodies out in the field somewhere, even if hygiene were not an issue. Obviously, we have to be concerned about diseases that come about through the exposure of corpses, but even from a non-hygienic standpoint, I think that we can all see the wrong and dishonor done to any, who are simply left alone, and exposed to birds of prey and animals of the wild. And I think that we would all shutter at the notion of seeing a lifeless body rot, while hanging in the air, with no intention of it ever being buried. It is human to despise such things, is it not?

Well, this further brings us to consider what is the acceptable practice, of handling the dead, in the sight of God? And brethren, when we look at biblical history; when we look at Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the ways in which the people of God had handled their dead throughout all of history, it is worth noting, that the honorable way of bringing closure to an individual life is by way of burial. Burial is the proper means of honoring the life of those who have died.

Now, why do I say this? Well, while I would not necessarily condemn anyone for thinking otherwise, I have a hard time reconciling the whole notion of cremation with what I find in Scripture. In fact, burning the body was frequently associated with heathen practices and heathen worship [Molech; purifying, dealing with spirits; Exhuming of bones to be burned].

Today, from an American cultural standpoint, when cremation is done, it is done from more of a financial and/or sentimental standpoint. It is much cheaper to cremate, rather than have to incur all of the expenses that go with a proper burial, and some like to have their ashes thrown into the ocean or somewhere memorable... etc. But again, the Scriptures do have something to say about this important matter, and the very clear practice of honoring the dead has always been by way of burial. Furthermore, proper burial, at least, in picture, recognizes the reality of a coming resurrection of these very bodies. Indeed, they will yet rot underground, but God will restore and raise up these very bodies, and the burial of the dead, communicates the awaiting of this reality, when our Lord will call out, and bring all of the dead, out of their respective tombs.

All of that said, I would not say, that because someone was cremated or had someone cremated, that anyone is going to hell for it... etc. I just believe that we ought to strive for the Biblical pattern, and our text indicates that there is a "God ordained" sensitivity, which ought to govern how we handle the deceased. [Obviously, uncontrolled or unique circumstances perhaps, but the exception does not negate the rule]

2) Let us recognize and contemplate the willingness of God, to once again bless the land, once the sins of Saul and Israel have been properly atoned for. Israel had suffered a three year famine, because of sins, which were not dealt with in the past. But once David had discovered

the cause of the famine, he dealt with it accordingly, and God graciously restored His blessing and favor upon the land.

Brethren, let this be an encouragement to us, seeing here, that God is more than willing to restore a fruitful life to His barren church, should she properly deal with her sins and her dulness of heart. In Revelation 2-3, God offers renewal to the sinning churches of Asia Minor, if they would but repent of whatever it is, that has incurred God's displeasure. In the case of the church of Ephesus, there was the need to repent, and to return to her first love, doing the things she did at the first, before she had left her first love of Christ. And brethren, we have a God, who is willing to restore the harvest to His dull churches; restoring the years, which the locusts have eaten away, should they return to Him, in sincerity, and in Christ. The atonement is already provided. But it must be sought, and repentance must take place, if we are to anticipate and expect God's showers of blessing.

Brethren, if any of you have drifted as individuals; if your commitment to, and love for Christ has waxed dim, see here the incentive to return, rather than, retreat further into a state of perpetual regret and hopelessness. The Gospel is right there for us, at all times, and so, let us examine ourselves, and let us return to Christ for grace, if we have gone astray, getting too caught up in the distractions of temporal things and every day life. Our God is gracious, and He will abundantly pardon! Would it be, that we would all take an honest, personal inventory of our lives, to see what our spiritual gauge, presently displays. And would it be, that we would, by the grace of God, make all necessary adjustments and changes. May God ignite a flame in the heart of this church, compelling us to dive headlong into His grace and service, so that we might grow as a body, and build an evangelistic mechanism, which tears down the gates of hell, unto the rescuing of many lost souls, by the power of the life giving Gospel of Christ! The harvest is indeed white and plentiful, but the laborers are so, so few.

[The empty, barren and fruitless life, of living life apart from God and His Christ...]

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25