

April 28, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 32.

1. What is the overall theme of Moses' song?
2. Moses opened the song talking about God's perfect justice and holiness. Why is that important in light of the rest of the song?
3. What is a handmade idol?
4. In what ways do we show rejection of God in favor of the idol we have made?
5. To what extent did God punish his people Israel, and what lesson, if any, does that teach us?
6. Can you think of any idols you have ever created in your own life?

MOSES' SONG Deuteronomy 32

As we begin to think through the song Moses wrote, what are our first thoughts? Knowing what we do about this choice servant of the Lord, would Moses teach the people how to sing about God's goodness? Many of David's songs had the goodness of God as their theme. Or maybe Moses would sing about the mighty power of the Lord as He revealed it in the Egyptian plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, and in the innumerable miracles during forty years of desert

wandering. Or maybe Moses would sing a whining, complaining song about how hard it was to deal with those stubborn people. That might sound like a country western song, like a sad melody, a "somebody done somebody wrong" song.

In this song, we do discover Moses' testimony about God's goodness and majesty. But as we read through the entire song, we might be a bit surprised to discover that this is a song about God's vengeance against His people's rebellion. Not only is this not a happy song. It is a scary song. Here Moses, under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, teaches us that just vengeance belongs to God. That is a message that bluntly cuts across the grain of our religious culture that is all about God's kindness, mercy, and grace.

Of course God is kind. He is more merciful than we can imagine. His grace is immeasurable. But when His people replace Him with their handmade idols, it does not make God very happy. We do well to learn from this song to be very careful about setting God aside to make room for our own idols.

God of Love (vv.1-14).

Moses' song begins by describing the perfect "Rock" (vv.1-6). The first words are a call to listen to sound teaching. *"Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb. For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God!"* (vv.1-3). In this statement, Moses calls on all of God's creation to hear the words of this song. He proposed to declare all the character, works, and attributes of the LORD (that is what *name* means). That would be to offer to God the truth about His greatness, which is actually what it means to praise God.

Because those words are truth, we could say with Moses that it is sound teaching about the "Rock." *"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he"* (v.4). His work is perfect. His ways are just. God is faithful. But His people are not (v.5). That is the

problem. Instead of being like God, *“They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation”* (v.5).

In spite of the fact that God is perfectly faithful and just, too often His chosen people act like they are corrupted. Indeed they are. They have brought blemishes on themselves rendering them crooked and twisted—totally unlike the pure, faithful Heavenly Father. Is that any way to treat your Father who created you and blessed you? That is what Moses wondered. *“Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?”* (v.6).

No, that is not a proper response to God our Creator. But in order to think differently, it helps if we will rehearse God’s demonstrations of love (vv.7-11). Consider demonstrations of the Creator’s authority. Stop to think about and talk about what He has done. Or in the words of Moses, *“Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you”* (v.7). In remembering, we will discover that our Creator has the right to decide who lives, who lives where, and when. *“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God”* (v.8).

Our Creator also has the right to show special love. He chose Jacob. *“But the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage”* (v.9). Because of God’s choice, Jacob’s lineage is the LORD’s *portion*. Jacob’s lineage is the LORD’s *people*. Jacob’s lineage is the LORD’s *allotted heritage*. He proved multiple times that He loves Jacob’s lineage. *“He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him. He made him ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field, and he suckled him with honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock. Curds from the herd, and milk from the flock, with fat of lambs, rams of Bashan and goats, with the very finest of the wheat – and you drank foaming wine made from the blood of the grape”* (vv.10-14). Oh, there is no doubt that the seed

that grew out of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are God’s special, chosen people, just as much as we born again Christians are. Unfortunately, that marvelous choice doesn’t seem to keep us from sinning against our Creator.

Rebellious Children (vv.15-18).

Rebellion is obvious when there is a wrong response to the LORD’s blessings (vv.15-18). Moses pointed out how the LORD’s children grew fat on His blessings. *“But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation”* (v.15). That statement reminds us that it is very easy for us to respond incorrectly so that God’s blessings can make His people spiritually lethargic. Then we fail to be thankful. We conclude that we deserve the blessings or that the blessings are the result of our own efforts and wisdom. As a result, we forsake God and treat lightly the Rock of our salvation.

Worse is that the LORD’s children replaced Him. *“They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth”* (vv.16-18).

The root issue was strange gods. The people created things out of their ideas to replace God. They would act like the rebels at Mt. Sinai who worshiped a bull by looking to it as the source of their joy, hope, blessing, satisfaction in life. Sacrificing (i.e. giving of time, energy, effort, as well as literal sacrifice) to our handmade gods is equivalent to worshiping demons. This is so dangerous because anyone and anything can replace God in our minds.

It is usually a matter of us remembering there is a God we are supposed to love and serve; but at the same time, allowing something or someone to get between us and God. John Calvin is credited with saying, “The heart is a perpetual idol factory. Tear down one idol and your heart will immediately build another.”

That, by God’s children, is no small matter to Him. It draws out Divine punishment (vv.19-25). The LORD’s punishment is revealed partly in the silent treatment. The LORD turns away because His sons

and daughters provoked Him. *“The LORD saw it and spurned them, because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters”* (v.19). The LORD chose to hide knowing well what the result will be, but desiring for the rebels to know what it is like not to have their Father’s attention. *And he said, “I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness”* (v.20).

Though God loved His people, He gave them the silent treatment—and still does. If you grow weary of God correcting, directing, rebuking, you may force a worse situation which is God’s silence.

Furthermore, in the LORD’s discipline, provocation with non-gods results in provocation by non-people. God said, *“They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation”* (v.21). The idols we make are very real—they are just not God. The world is full of pagans who are not really God’s people, but who God would use to punish those who are His people.

When God grows angry, His anger is indescribably deep. *“For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. And I will heap disasters upon them; I will spend my arrows on them; they shall be wasted with hunger, and devoured by plague and poisonous pestilence; I will send the teeth of beasts against them, with the venom of things that crawl in the dust. Outdoors the sword shall bereave, and indoors terror, for young man and woman alike, the nursing child with the man of gray hairs”* (vv.22-25). The personal pronouns reveal the source of “bad things” that happen to God’s people when they rebel. Notice that God promised, “I heap disasters; I spend my arrows; I will send beasts.” Those words kind of make us wonder if this same God exists in our age of super-grace that seems to wink at sin.

Just God (vv.26-38).

The just God knows the enemy well (vv.26-34). But can our text be correct when it indicates that God fears the enemy? He said,

“I would have said, ‘I will cut them to pieces; I will wipe them from human memory,’ had I not feared provocation by the enemy, lest their adversaries should misunderstand, lest they should say, ‘Our hand is triumphant, it was not the LORD who did all this’” (vv.26-27).

This statement does not mean that God feared the pagans. Rather it means that He feared the pagan people who God used to chastise His people would come to the wrong conclusions. They would almost have to come to the wrong conclusions because they are sinful. They would conclude that they were more powerful than God’s people and, therefore, more powerful than God.

Therefore, God explains sinful logic. If the world had wisdom, they would understand what God does when He disciplines His people, and why He does it. They cannot. *“For they are a nation void of counsel, and there is no understanding in them. If they were wise, they would understand this”* (vv.28-29a). In fact, if the world had wisdom, they would understand and fear their own end. *“They would discern their latter end!”* (v.29b). If the world had wisdom, they would see the evidence of God’s hand. *“How could one have chased a thousand, and two have put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had given them up?”* (v.30). If the world had wisdom, they would understand the difference between their rock and THE ROCK. *“For their rock is not as our Rock; our enemies are by themselves”* (v.31).

If the world had wisdom, they would understand their identification with Sodom and Gomorrah and fear their pending doom. *“For their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison; their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of asps. Is not this laid up in store with me, sealed up in my treasuries?”* (vv.32-34).

God works in ways that the unregenerate citizens of creation cannot fathom. But also it is hard for His own people to understand how God reserves vengeance for Himself (vv.35-43). Vengeance is God’s right (vv.35-38). He authors swift calamity in order to level vengeance and get recompense from His people who rebel. He warned us, *“Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly”* (v.35).

At the same time, because God is merciful, He vindicates His servants in the eyes of those very instruments He uses to punish His people's rebellion. Moses taught, *"For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free"* (v.36). And yet God's mercy does not relinquish His people's responsibility for their sins. *Then he will say, "Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection!"* (vv.37-38).

Vengeance means that God will repay (vv.39-43). *"See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear, As I live forever, if I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh – with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the long-haired heads of the enemy"* (vv.39-42).

These verses leave no doubt to the question of who authorizes the painful retribution for sin. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. But His creation rejoices to see the Creator vindicate His holy, faithful justice. *"Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land"* (v.43). So the rejoicing will be great in that last and terrible day of judgment. It is possible to view God's justice against people who offend Him as theoretical, possible, potential, but not real or imminent. Moses felt otherwise.

Application of Justice (vv.44-52).

Moses warned that these are not empty words (vv.44-47). Therefore, he challenged the people to take care to teach the next generation. First Moses recited the song, *Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua the son of Nun.*(v.44). Then he challenged the people to teach all the words. *And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all*

Israel he said to them, "Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law (vv.45-46).

This is the same kind of instruction Moses gave at the very beginning of these to major speeches. *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

The challenge is for God's people to realize that instruction in truth is life. *"For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess"* (v.47). None of God's words are empty. But especially warnings about His pending judgment for sin and offenses is not empty. The Bible is the difference between abundant life and a life of regret and sorrow; eternal life and eternal punishment.

Moses of all people could challenge us with all his heart because God proved His justice with Moses (vv.48-52). He issued a just sentence against Moses because of his sin. *That very day the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother died in Mount Hor and was gathered to his people (vv.48-50).*

This sudden command was not a shock to Moses. Previously God had revealed that Moses would not enter the Promised Land. The sentence was handed down at the time of Moses' rebellion (Num. 20:12). So Moses prefaced all the instruction of Deuteronomy with the reminder that God did not permit him to enter the Promised Land (Deut. 1:37).

Now God informed Moses that the day had come. Is this how we will feel when it becomes obvious that we have reached the end?

Will we have warning? Will we be ready to walk through that valley of the shadow of death, confident that all our rebellion against our Creator is forgiven by the blood of the Son?

The reason for this apparently harsh sentence is, *“because you broke faith with me in the midst of the people of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, and because you did not treat me as holy in the midst of the people of Israel. For you shall see the land before you, but you shall not go there, into the land that I am giving to the people of Israel”* (vv.51-52).

In short the problem, the sin was that, *you broke faith with me in the midst of the people* (v.51). Here is a very important lesson in human weakness. One time God had clearly instructed Moses to strike a rock and He would produce water from it (Exo. 17:2-6). At Merib God instructed Moses to speak to the rock and God would produce water. Instead, Moses took credit for producing the water. *Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?”* (Numbers 20:10)

Granted the people had falsely accused Moses of bad leadership which had to make him angry (Num. 20:3-5). Nevertheless, Moses lost his temper and struck the rock twice (Num. 20:11). God’s assessment was that Moses had robbed God of His glory in the sight of the people. Instead of showing the people how to have faith in God, how to trust God when it seemed like the rebellious people were in control, Moses acted like He was in control of the circumstances.

Saddest of all is that all of this was done by Moses, the man who God had assessed as the humblest of all people on earth (Num. 12:3). God had assessed Moses as the prime example of the faithful servant (Num. 12:7). God told Aaron and Miriam that Moses was so special to Him that He spoke to him face to face (Num. 12:8). God spoke to Moses like he was a friend (Exo. 33:11).

The reminder is grim. No servant of the Lord, no child of God is beyond failing in faithfulness toward God. No servant of the Lord is beyond God’s vengeance or vindication of His righteousness.

We rejoice to be God’s children, the product of His blessing and miracle of regeneration. However, we live in a world that is super-opposed to God, and in a flesh that is predisposed against Him. If we do not guard our hearts we will easily create idols that get between us

and God. That does not make God happy. In light of the warnings of this song, the wise children of God will take a good look at their lives and tear down any idols they have rejected to take God’s place or accomplish God’s will in their lives, no matter how small.