

Who is Your Rock and Refuge?

Palm Sunday – 04/10/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Deuteronomy 32:36-39 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 36a, **“The LORD will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone...”**.

v. 39b, [Translated directly from the original Hebrew,] **“...there is none that can deliver out of My [power]”**.

Introduction

- ✘ Today is Palm Sunday on the Church calendar; the day that begins a week like no other for us believers in Jesus Christ! As we begin what we call, “Holy Week”, today we remember how our Lord Jesus entered into Jerusalem amidst great fanfare to shouts of “Hosanna”.
 - ➔ He did so knowing that this would be the week that His earthly ministry would hit its peak and fulfill God’s plan for the salvation of all sinners around the world and throughout all time!
- ✘ So, why on Palm Sunday, has the Church of God assigned to us this obscure Old Testament Reading from the book of Deuteronomy? It is because of the deep theological connection between Moses, God’s servant to the people of Israel, and Jesus, the Father’s suffering servant and very own Son; the one whom God sent to fulfill His promise of mercy toward disobedient sinners in every age.
- ✘ The word “Deuteronomy” means “second Law”. So, the Book of Deuteronomy is where Moses lays God’s Law before His people a second time. More correctly we could say that he presents it to them one final time; before they enter and take possession of the Promised Land.
 - ➔ Especially now toward the end of the book, Moses has the same kind of forward-looking, anxious, and hopeful urgency of a parent on the day he sends a child off to college. It’s as if Moses is saying to his child, “Check the oil in your car. Call us every week. Don’t go to drunken parties. Don’t forget to go to church. And always remember that we love you.”
 - ➔ As he is saying “good-bye” to the people because God has told him he’s not allowed to enter the Promised Land with them, Moses gives them a song to sing; that he hopes the generations to come will sing; a song that speaks of their sadly inevitable waywardness into sin and how the Lord will deal with that. It is from that song that our sermon text comes today.
- ✘ It’s time now to consider what will happen in the future as Israel disobeys God’s Law. Prior to our text, in verses 15-18, Moses prophesies that the people have “scoffed at the Rock of [their] salvation”. That “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 [their] fathers had never dreaded.” Moses tells them bluntly, “You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth”.
 - ➔ So, how will God respond to this idolatry and sin, not only in the years immediately after Moses is gone, but how will God respond in a greater and grander way, for all time? Will He respond in fulfillment of the glorious salvation plan that He has promised through His Son, Jesus Christ; the one of whom we hear, riding into Jerusalem on a lowly colt today?

I. Two Key Words

- ✘ As we seek the answer to that question, we look at this brief text of four verses from Moses. And there are two words of great significance; words that I think we need to understand better in order for us to understand God’s message and its connection to His Son.

- ⊗ The first word is “rock”; “צור” (tsur) in the original Hebrew (v. 37). Moses uses this word nine times in chapter 32 to the point that it functions as the proper name for the God of Israel in this chapter.
 - ➔ In 32:4 Moses says, “The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice”. And in verse 37 of our text he even uses “צור” in a sarcastic tone when he asks the people about the false gods in whom they sinfully trusted. He quotes the LORD, “Where are their gods, the rock (צור) in which they took refuge...?”
- ⊗ You see, the image and reality of God as “the Rock” has a personal connection to Moses. On two different occasions, as Moses and the people were struggling through the wilderness, the LORD provided water for them when Moses struck a rock. The second time though, God told Moses not to strike the rock, but rather to speak to it. But because Moses disobeyed and struck the rock instead, he was no longer allowed to enter the Promised Land.
 - ➔ Now as they are about to enter without Him, we can’t help but think that incident is woven into his warning against disobeying the LORD here in his song.
 - ➔ On top of that St. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 10:4 that the Rock was Christ, and that this Rock “followed [the people]” through the wilderness. It moved! Rocks don’t do that, unless that Rock just happens to be the Son of God, that is.
- ⊗ The second word of importance is the word translated in verse 36 as “power” and in verse 39 as “hand”. In the Hebrew it is “יָד” (yad) and yes the same word can be translated as either “hand” or “power”. The Hebrew concept is that a person’s power is ultimately exercised and displayed by the actions of his hand. If he has no hand, then he has no power.
 - ➔ In verse 36, because the people have devoted themselves to false gods, they have lost their power; it is “gone”; they are without hands.
 - ➔ At the same time though, because Yahweh has shown Himself, and declares in verse 39 that “I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside Me” then His hand; His almighty power is firmly in place so that “there is none that can deliver” you or me or any of His beloved people, God says, “out of My hand” (יָד). Nothing will stop the saving power of His hand.
 - ➔ Just think of the fuller understanding that this gives to our confession in the Apostles’ Creed that Jesus now sits as our advocate and Savior “at the right hand of God”. He is the one who died, rose and ascended in victory over sin and Satan as God’s fullest and purest expression of His saving “power”!

II. You Find Yourself in a Big Mess

- ⊗ So how does all of this apply to you today, dear Christian? Let’s consider a few likely possibilities.
- ⊗ So you, like the people of Israel, have disobeyed the Law of God, and I mean really disobeyed it. Don’t think for a moment that we aren’t all guilty of this kind of sin. Well, now the nasty consequences are bearing down on you: diminished health, ruptured relationships and surly neighbors, opportunity loss, job loss, damaged reputation, monetary debts, earthly goods repossessed, doubt, depression, and anxiety. The list could go on, and there’s little you can do to fix the mess.
 - ➔ You had banked your happiness on all the things that got you into this hot mess in the first place. I doubt it happened all at once. It’s just that your eyes wandered away from your Rock; the one sure source of security.

- ⊗ By the way, Martin Luther, in his Large Catechism, asked this question: “What does it mean to have a god? Or, what is God?” His answer: “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress” [LC, I, 1–2].
- ⊗ It’s not that one day you actively woke up and decided to set aside your Rock; your God – that is the one who is and always has been God.
 - ➔ It’s just the deceptive ways of the world around you, and the devil who is one with the world, began to worm their way into your mind so that you now think of God as one source of good among many. Sure, you think He is the chief source, but, nevertheless, one among many.
 - ➔ And ever so slowly, you began to look to other things for your good and security. It probably all started thoughtlessly. Something just presented what seemed like an innocent opportunity. It seemed to make sense. So many other people around you were doing it. So you took it; you did it, and then took some more, until you were caught, so that here you are today, beginning to see that those so-called “opportunities” are actually enemies out to get you.
- ⊗ You do have enemies out to get you, and sometimes your biggest enemy is your own sinful nature. We all have them, things like our pride, or greed – disguised as something “I need”, or the desire to be liked, or gambling, or living together outside of marriage, or anger, jealousy, gossip, disobeying authority, or any of a host of self-centered desires. None of us is exempt friends.

III. How Will God Respond?

- ⊗ Look, all of you know the Law of God. The Holy Scriptures tell us it is written on your hearts, and God has baked it into His cosmos. So I’m not going to spend much time here on the content of that Law. I’m not going to tell you what an idiot you were; you already know that. We don’t have time for that. Besides, you already confessed your sin.
 - ➔ Yet I’ve got to ask you, “If you know God’s Law, why do you disobey it? Why do you stray from it? And when you do, does He just wipe His hands of you?” That’s the burning question our Old Testament Reading presents. It’s one that has preoccupied God’s people from time in memorial. Trust me – your experience is not unique. You are not the first one to blow it.
- ⊗ But still, this is a delicate moment for you; for us all. If you’re ashamed and dig in to prop up your pride, God will let you do that for a while. He’ll say as He did to the Israelites, “Where are those false gods of yours, the rock in which you took refuge? Did they accept your offerings? Have they answered your prayers? Just keep offering to them. Keep on praying to them and we’ll see how this works out”. You see, God is being sarcastic in verse 38 when He says those things.
- ⊗ He doesn’t really want you to do that, but then, sometimes we’re just so bullheaded that we have to get so deep into the mess we’re in so that we will finally look to the one true Rock for help; the only One who is our true good and security.

IV. He Absorbs all the Consequences for Us

- ⊗ Yes, you have made a royal mess of it all, haven’t you? But as He promises in verse 36, the LORD “will vindicate” you. He will have compassion on you. He sees that you are powerless against these things that have caught you – including your own sinful nature. You’re so powerless in fact that it’s as though your hands have been cut off and the blood has drained out of you and now you’re a quivering heap of sadness. All that you have, your pride, your power, your hand – none of it is going to do what you need; it’s all gone.

→ Here now is what your Rock says to your enemies: “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, (that is My power)” (v 39).

⊗ And how does He do that? By stretching out His own hands; that is the hands of His Son who rode into Jerusalem as the humble King on the colt of a donkey.

→ Yes, He does His greatest work when He, the all-powerful Creator is most powerless Himself. That’s what we rehearse and remember and even celebrate with tears of shame and repentance in this holiest of all weeks. He does it with His hands nailed to the cross; with His blood draining out – He saves you. He saves the whole world from sin!

Conclusion

⊗ Yes, God takes vengeance on our enemies by taking the blows that come our way. All of those enemies were out to get you. They were bearing in on you. You were circled by it all – the shame and disobedience, the sin that leaves us all completely powerless.

→ And suddenly, your Rock came as a decoy, drawing them off and absorbing all of the blows that you deserved. He took the form of a servant; your servant; God’s suffering servant. And He dies so that you now live with Him! Amen.