

“My people are Destroyed for Lack of Knowledge”

Our first reading of 2 Chronicles chapter 36 recounts for us some of the sins of Israel, as they polluted the house of Yahweh which was hallowed in Jerusalem (vs 14). But it also describes the mercy and lovingkindness of the Lord, in that He did not instantly destroy the offenders, but he graciously sent messengers to exhort them to repent and turn back to Him:

“Yahweh, God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place ...” (2 Chron. 36:15)

But then the record continues to describe the people’s response to the message spoken by those prophets:

“But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” (2 Chron. 36:16).

This misuse of the prophetic messengers was also characteristic of those who heard the words of the greatest prophet of all, even Yahweh’s Anointed. In the record of Matthew chapter 21, we read of one of Messiah’s parables. Verse 33 commences the parable of a vineyard planted by a householder, who subsequently went into a far country, and let it out to others, to ensure that it would yield fruit. However, when he sent his servants to receive the fruits it produced, they mocked those messengers, and misused them, just like Israel of old:

“... And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all, he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize upon his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him” (Mat. 21:35-39).

So it was, that they mocked and derided the messengers of Yahweh – which were sent for their benefit, that they might bring forth the fruits of repentance and find acceptance in the eyes of the householder. Even the Son was mocked of them (Mat. 27:29, 31), and was taken by wicked hands, crucified and slain. But despite apparent weakness in these matters, the glory and power of God was manifested. He chooses to use the weak and despised amongst men to bring about his ultimate purpose:

“... we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ **the power of God**, and **the wisdom of God**. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:23-25).

The second portion of our readings comes from Hosea chapter 4, from which we have derived the title of this paper. Here, we see the same spirit of disobedience, and lack of interest in studying the Word of God:

“My people are **destroyed for lack of knowledge**: because **thou hast rejected knowledge**, I will also reject thee, that thou should be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6).

Notice the point here: not only did Israel neglect the obtaining of knowledge; when it was placed before them, they turned away from it: “thou hast rejected knowledge”. As we saw above, Yahweh sent messengers to urge them to repentance, yet the people rejected even a knowledge of their message. Truly it is written that the was “no remedy”.

RECEIVING SPIRITUAL THINGS

Those who are able to come to the Word with understanding are in a most privileged position. The majority of mankind wander aimlessly down the broad way that leads to destruction, not even aware of the other, narrow way that leads to life. The natural man simply cannot perceive spiritual things:

“... the natural man **receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God**: for they are foolishness unto him: **neither can he know them**, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

This describes the vast majority of men and women: when spiritual things are put to them, they just cannot receive, or know them. But how then can a person be saved? How can such people learn the Wisdom of God, that gives life? Only by making the effort to change their mindset from a carnally dominated mind to a more spiritual one. Romans chapter 10 describes the process:

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, **and hearing by the word of God ...**” (Rom. 10:16-17)

Notice, this verse is often misquoted as saying “faith cometh by hearing the word of God”. But that is not what it states: hearing itself is something that comes from the Word of God. It is written elsewhere that “the hearing ear, and seeing eye, Yahweh hath made even both of them.” (Prov. 20:12). Yahweh himself creates a hearing ear that is able to receive spiritual things – and He does so “by the word” he speaks. As a person reads more, and learns more, the more they will be able to perceive the Divine concepts and teaching of the Word. They start off as babes, desiring the pure milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2), and progress towards solid food (Heb. 5:12, 14). Gradually, partaking of this spiritual food, they will develop and change in their outlook, to embrace spiritual things. But just as a babe cannot eat solid food, neither can a babe in Christ receive the solid food of the Word. He must be fed precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little (cp. Isa. 28:10), for he cannot know them in any other way, and will otherwise end up rejecting it altogether. Such is the means whereby a sinner becomes a saint.

DIVINE APPROVAL

The Scripture itself tells the believer to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of Truth.” (2 Tim.2:15). The implication, therefore, is that if we do not study, we will need to be ashamed. If we have workmen in our house, and leave them to work, when we return, we would not expect them to have spent all their time drinking tea, and doing no work! Such a workman should indeed be ashamed: he has not done that work he has contracted to do. Even so, we must show ourselves to be labourers in the word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17), and therefore will not need to be ashamed.

The benefits of Bible Study are also detailed in 2 Timothy:

“ ... all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

THE POWER OF THE WORD

There is another benefit from studying the Scriptures: they are powerful. 2 Timothy 3 informs us that they “are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). The Apostle describes them elsewhere as being “living and **powerful**” (Heb. 4:12). And again, the Good News that the Bible contains is the “**power** of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). The Scriptures then, can give us life – the implication being that we ignore them at our peril.

The power of the Word is again illustrated in Acts chapter 11, which describes for us the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion. After he received an angelic apparition, he was told to:

“Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, **whereby** thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14).

For Cornelius then, it was important for him to give all due attention to the words of Peter, in order that both he and his house would be saved. For him, it truly was the power of God unto salvation.

In our New Testament reading for today, we have this same theme expressed. In this chapter, we have recorded how the Apostle Paul said to the elders at Ephesus:

“I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, **which is able to** build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified ...” (Acts 20:32).

With such a mighty power that can be derived from the Word, to neglect it is to deny ourselves access to that power. Indeed, by neglecting the “power of God unto salvation”, we are in very real danger of endangering our eternal future. The issues really are of life and death.

The Word of God is unique, and different to the words of men, in that the wisdom that it teaches can save our lives. It must be received and approached, in a different way. The Thessalonians recognised this:

“When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God **which effectually worketh also in you** that believe” (1 Thes. 2:13).

The centres of worldly learning – the colleges and universities - encourage and develop in students a particular approach towards objects of study. It is seen as important to remain detached and objective in analysing a particular piece of text, and to respect other people’s point of view, which may differ from theirs. But the Bible is different. It “effectually worketh” in those who believe – which means that to remain detached and objective will deny us of that inward working. We must absorb its principles into our thinking, so that it becomes part of us, cleansing our minds and working a great work in developing a godly conscience against sin. We need to accept and embrace its teachings and allow it to direct our steps in a godly fashion. We need to always keep it in our minds, and permit it’s influence to direct our thoughts and actions.

Returning to our reading in Hosea chapter 4, Israel were told told that:

“because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee ... seeing **thou hast forgotten** the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6).

Not giving constant attention to the word, the people eventually had “forgotten” it. Here is the danger, and the importance of daily Bible reading: we are forgetful creatures, and if we do not keep a focus upon the Word, we shall forget what it contains. So Paul warned:

“Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand: by which also ye are saved, ***If ye keep in memory*** what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

The Word is only of use to us if we have it in our minds. We need to “keep in memory” the principles and precepts that it contains, for if we forget, we will have “believed in vain”. So Peter also encouraged those who had obtained like precious faith, to accept a reminder of what they had previously believed:

“... wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always ***in remembrance*** of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth ...” (2 Peter 1:13).

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

When we come to consider the example of the Master, we see One who was the Word made flesh (Jno. 1:14). He did not neglect the Word, but constantly fed upon it. So the Prophet speaks of him:

“The Lord Yahweh hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, ***he wakeneth my ear to hear as the learned.*** The Lord Yahweh hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (Isa. 50:4-5).

The people amongst whom Messiah lived and walked “marvelled, saying, How know this man letters, having never learned?” (Jno. 7:17). But they were mistaken: truly he did not learn in the institutions of worldly education, but he received a greater wisdom from above. His ear was “wakened” morning by morning to the Word of his Father. Again, in the Psalms it is written:

“Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire, ***Mine ears hast thou opened:*** Burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy Will, O my God, Yea, thy law is within my heart ...” (Psa. 40:6-8).

Notice again, the point that it was because his ears were “opened” to his Father’s voice, His law was within his heart. He never neglected that Word: he was rather the very embodiment with it. He met each temptation he faced with a “thus saith the Lord”, and derived great strength from it’s wisdom.

It is written by Paul to the believers at Colosse: “Let the word of Christ ***dwelt in you richly*** in all wisdom ...” (Col. 3:16). But logically, the word of Christ cannot dwell in us, unless we put it there. To study the Bible brings great enjoyment and pleasure to men of the Spirit (Rom. 7:22), and it also provides wisdom, and a power by which we can be saved. We disregard it therefore, at our peril.

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