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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 31, 2016
11th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Acts 7:54-59

Hymns: 246; 243; 744; 45 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 32:1-9

“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

2 Let my teaching drop as the rain,
My speech distill as the dew,

As raindrops on the tender herb,
And as showers on the grass.

3 For I proclaim the name of the LORD:
Ascribe greatness to our God.

4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect;
For all His ways are justice,
A God of truth and without injustice;
Righteous and upright is He.

5 “They have corrupted themselves;
They are not His children,
Because of their blemish:

A perverse and crooked generation.

6 Do you thus deal with the LORD,
O foolish and unwise people?

Is He not your Father, who bought you?
Has He not made you and established you?

7 “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:

8 When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations,
When He separated the sons of Adam,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the children of Israel.
9 For the LORD's portion is His people;
Jacob is the place of His inheritance. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Your outlook for the future. --

Do you see good times ahead? Do you see only trouble? Some people are optimists; others are pessimists; still others are realists. What was Jesus? In our gospel lesson Jesus sounds an awful lot like a pessimist. Jesus was looking forward beyond the time of His earthly sojourn. He announced that when He would send out messengers of His grace and salvation that they would be scourged and persecuted and killed and chased down from city to city. He saw terrible things ahead for Jerusalem, things that caused Jesus great sorrow.

In our text Moses is at the end of his life and so also the end of his time of leadership of the people of Israel. Moses presented this song as his farewell address, and the verses that make up our text are but the opening of a much longer psalm. However, the tone of Moses' message that is set in these early verses is carried throughout. He looks back and he looks forward, and Moses, as an inspired prophet of God, doesn't like what he sees that will come to pass. He sounds very pessimistic about the conduct of the nation of Israel even after the Lord presents them with a wondrous homeland in which to live, on top of choosing them as the nation from who the Savior of the world would come.

For this time of transition Moses said what needed to be said, what needed to be heard by the people of Israel.

THEME: The Song of Moses Directs Us to Abide in God's Grace.
First

I. Moses Recounts God's Faithfulness

In the opening words of Moses' song he makes it clear that what he has to say about God is a universal truth. He declared:

Deuteronomy 32:1-3 "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

2 Let my teaching drop as the rain,

My speech distill as the dew,

As raindrops on the tender herb,

And as showers on the grass.

3 For I proclaim the name of the LORD:

Ascribe greatness to our God."

The truth that Moses proclaims is for all to hear and understand. The teachings of Moses regarding the LORD are true for all and necessary for all. Just as all the earth needs the rain that falls from the sky, so all the people of the earth need to know the truth about God. This truth is needed by all; it is beneficial, refreshing and life-giving for all who believe. After the last 40 years of Moses' life in which he worked in close communion with the LORD in leading the people of Israel, Moses knew a thing or two about God. He knew a thing or two about the LORD because the LORD had revealed Himself to Moses in both power and grace. The Spirit of God was with Moses and directing all that Moses declared to the people of Israel. And so Moses **proclaimed the name of the LORD**. The LORD presented Himself as the living God, the "I AM," who was also the covenant God who remembered the promises He had made to Abraham, the covenant of salvation dating all the way back to Eden. It was this covenant of salvation that lies at the heart of the greatness of God.

God is Faithful! He did not forsake the Children of Israel. Moses had reminded the people: "**So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders.** ⁹**He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, 'a land flowing with milk and honey'**" (Deuteronomy 26:8,9). He had defeated the armies of Pharaoh; they drowned in the midst of the Red Sea. That really happened. It happened so that the Lord could bring these, His

people, into the Promised Land. For forty years they had wandered in the wilderness because of the failure of the people to trust the LORD and enter into Canaan. For forty years the LORD provided bread to eat and water to drink, and their clothing and their shoes did not wear out, not for the entire forty years. For forty years the Lord had kept them from harm and danger and preserved them from every evil. Now it was time for Moses to die, and for the next leader of Israel to go before them into Canaan. Moses wanted them all to remember the truth about the Lord, that –

Deuteronomy 32:4 “He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.”

God is totally dependable. He is always there in time of need. The LORD performs all that He has promised and does it all to completeness. Nothing is ever half done, or neglected, or unjust. He is perfect in all His ways.

For us this lesson remains true. Everything Moses declared in the presence of the people of Israel is just as true today, 3500 years later. God hasn't changed. His ways have not changed. His grace and power are not diminished. People might assume that Moses spoke in times that were more superstitious and less scientific. That's nonsense on both counts. People in the world today are no smarter than those who lived at the time of Moses, no more sophisticated, and no more self-sufficient. And God is still our Rock, our Fortress, the One who keeps us safe from all our enemies. All His ways continue to be just and true.

The only way that statement can stand is for us to remember that God does require payment for all sin. God Himself provided the sacrifice for sin in the death of His Son. Our hope in God is in that same Lamb that the people of Israel learned of with the picture of the Passover lamb. Jesus is that “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). In his farewell Moses -

II. Reminds Us of our Continuous Need for God's Forgiving Grace.

Deuteronomy 32:5-6 “They have corrupted themselves;

They are not His children, Because of their blemish:
A perverse and crooked generation.

6 Do you thus deal with the LORD, O foolish and unwise people?
Is He not your Father, who bought you?
Has He not made you and established you?"

This is where we hear Moses sounding like that pessimist who can only see the bad in people. One might accuse Moses of assuming that the people would turn to evil ways, do bad things, and turn against the Lord. In response let us recall that Moses spoke by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who knows all things. The Spirit who knows the heart of man, even as He brings us a new spirit by calling us to faith. The Spirit of God is well aware of the presence of our "old Adam," that is our sinful nature, the perversity of humanity that contaminates us all. Yes, Moses was led by the Spirit to speak in disparaging terms of the future of this people, that he might awaken them to their need to be steadfast and true to the LORD and to respond to the LORD's deliverance and salvation in a right way.

This is a message that we still need today. We also are drawn away by our own sinful desires and fall into sin. It is depressing. It is oppressive. It is disgusting. God deserves better from us for all that He has done for us in His mercy and grace. He has showered us with the blessings of our salvation, and He has showered us with material blessings all our days. He cares for us, and all His ways are just and true. And yet we respond with sin. This is true for each and every one of us. We confess it freely, as we already did this morning when we confessed that we have sinned in thought, and word and deed. This is true for us all. Even the Apostle Paul was overcome with disgust because of the continuing presence of sin in his life. He declared in his Epistle to the Romans:

Romans 7:19,24 "The good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. ... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Even as we join in confessing our sin and wretchedness before the LORD so we also remember the exhortation of Moses that we recall that the LORD is the one who bought us. He bought us with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot. The precious

blood of Christ still cleanses us from sin. So even as we see the stark reality of our sin, and are brought to our knees in confession, so the Lord lifts us up, and provides for a future and a hope. So we also join Paul in praising God in response to his desperate confession: **“I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord”** (Romans 7:25)!

That also was part and parcel of Moses parting message which --

III. Directs Us to the Hope of the Grace to Come

Deuteronomy 32:7-9 “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:
8 When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations,
When He separated the sons of Adam,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the children of Israel.
9 For the LORD’s portion is His people;
Jacob is the place of His inheritance.

This message wasn’t intended only for the generation of Israel that stood before Moses on the day he first spoke the words of this song or psalm. That is made abundantly clear by these verses, which are still introductory in nature to a much longer song. The generations to come would be living in the fulfillment of the promises of God that were still a hope for the generation that stood in Moses presence and heard these words. Yes, all was about to be fulfilled. Through Joshua the Lord would lead Israel forward into the Promised Land and give each of the tribes their portion, their inheritance. He would bless them in a good land with many blessings, for these were the people He had chosen and separated out of the rest of the world, the rest of the descendants of Adam. For the Lord, this was all as good as done, literally, for the Lord it was as good as done as good as if the children of Israel has already entered into Canaan and taken possession of their inheritance.

And so the Lord addresses us through Moses. We live in the hope of the glory of God. He has an inheritance secured for us in Christ. As far as God is concerned it is all as good as done, for us and for

any and all generations that follow after us. For all those whom the Lord Himself has called and gathered out of the nations of the earth He as their inheritance in the heavens.

He cares for you. The Lord's greatest desire is your eternal salvation. He wants you as His child and His heir. He wants you in heaven with Him. This is why He sent His only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. This is what lies behind all that God has done in sending out His messengers of grace, in calling us to faith, in caring for us all our days. What does God want out of this world? What does He hope for with all His heart? Our text concludes: **“the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance.”** His share of the inheritance gained by the death of His Son is YOU! You and me, and the rest of the believers in this world is exactly what the Lord hopes for in the end, and He shall bring it to pass. In fact, it is as good as done, even your eternal salvation!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)