

## Deuteronomy 31:30-32:14. The Song of Moses. 6/2/22

When God called Moses, one of the excuses Moses made was that he wasn't very good at speaking. Words weren't his thing. Or so he thought. How ironic, because Moses became such a man of words.

He became the channel for God's words to the people of Israel. What he thought of as his weakness became his strength. He delivered the 10 words from God: the 10 commandments, along with a lifetime of teaching, encouragement and well-aimed reprimand when it was needed. Now, at the end of his life, God tells him that he hasn't got long left. After he dies Joshua will take over as Israel's leader as they cross into the Promised Land. He won't get to go with them. You might think that Moses wouldn't feel much like singing at this news. But God commands him to write down a song, to sing it and teach it to the Israelites so that they will remember it.

It begins: "Listen O heavens and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants".

Songs invite us to use our imagination. This says, "supposing you think about God's teaching as being like rain bringing life in the desert?" If you have been watching the latest David Attenborough programme, *The Green Planet*, you will have seen the wonderful way in which plants spring to life even in the most barren and inhospitable landscape, sometimes after many years of drought, after just a few drops of precious rain. It's an image that is used many times in the Bible. The word of God bringing life in the desert.

Words of wisdom from God falling on the earth, replenishing it, enabling it to flourish. God's words bring life.

The second image in the Song is to reinforce the nature of God's character. Supposing you think about God like a rock? "Praise the greatness of our God" sings Moses. "He is the Rock, his words are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he". Here is a God you can depend on. Solid, immovable, strong.

But suddenly there is a note of discord. If we could hear the melody, it would jar and clash. What breaks the harmony is Moses' (and God's) assessment of the Israelites. In contrast to their faithful God, the people have acted corruptly. They are a "warped and crooked generation". An accusation that Jesus would repeat in his day. "Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?"

These are hard words for a rebellious people. Moses knew all about that. He'd had the task of leading them through the wilderness for 40 years. "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past" sings Moses. They need to look back and remember their history. They need to remember that God chose them out of all the nations to be his special people and to become a blessing to the nations around them. They needed to remember how God had led them and cared for them and protected them. He was with them throughout the time they had wandered through an empty, windswept wasteland; at risk of losing their way in every sense of that phrase. They are to remember, not from any sense of nostalgia, but so that they can act differently in the present and learn to trust more fully in the love of God.

And now for a new image: God has cared for them like an eagle: "like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions". It's a good image because young birds are so vulnerable. They can easily fall out of the nest. Their parents have to feed them, protect them against the weather, encourage them to

take to the air and fly, watch over them until they can fend for themselves. For some of you it might recall the book *The Lord of the Rings* where the eagles come to the rescue in the midst of a great battle, carrying some of the characters off on their backs or in their talons. I wonder if Tolkien had these verses in mind when he wrote that scene?

This is what God has done for the Israelites. He has come to their rescue. He has provided all that is good for them. He has nourished them with wild honey from the rocks, and oil from the flinty crag.

Just like rain in the desert, it is a picture of God bringing something beneficial from what appears to be desolate.

Now their time of wandering is almost over. As they enter the Promised Land they will become settled. Once they have arrived, things will be very different. They will be surrounded by people who worship other gods. There is the risk of complacency, of becoming too comfortable, losing the challenge of the journey, and ending their reliance on God.

And so it was to be. God saw that, Moses saw that, and so his song had to include some hard words, of judgement. If you read on you will see that the song sets out the harsh reality of human waywardness. The people will reject God and his commandments, forget how much he has done for them. They will worship idols.

God will be angry, because he knows that this will not turn out well for them. His commandments were designed to give them a good life, the best there could be. But if they go their own way, they will be courting disaster. In fact, *God* will bring disaster upon them, in order to bring them back to himself. There are 2 things that God wants to avoid. He doesn't want to wipe out his people and he doesn't want Israel's enemies to take the credit for the disasters that are going to come upon them. But, as always, God's compassion will get the better of him. He will judge his people, and will punish them, but he will also still be the Rock, and ultimately they can depend on his mercy and grace. God says "there is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal and no-one can deliver out of my hand".....he will take vengeance on Israel's enemies and make atonement for his land and people.

Moses faithfully delivers the song God has given him to sing. And then he tells the Israelites to take his words to heart. **"These are not just idle words for you – they are your life"** he tells them. Moses has certainly learnt the importance of words, even though he once said that he wasn't very good at public speaking.

The song of Moses is full of contrasts. It speaks of God's anger as well as God's love for his people.

What are the things that make God angry today? We still have idols – anything that takes the place of God in our lives. It must make him angry to see our lack of care for the planet, lack of care for one another, the exploitation of vulnerable people, and all injustice.

Do we take seriously enough the fact that his word is still active and powerful and life-giving today?

We need the God who can bring good things out of the barrenness of our lives. We need his words of healing and restoration when we feel as if we are walking through the desert. We need God, the Rock, who we can depend on. God the eagle who is the rescuer and protector. God offers us the words of eternal life, through Jesus our Saviour. To repeat what Moses said: These are not just idle words, they are *your* life. Take them: he offers them to you.