**A memorable gospel song**

Text: Deuteronomy 31:30-32:47

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Deuteronomy 31:30-32:47; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 160, 468, 90, 393, 530

**Series:** Deuteronomy (#18)

**Theme:** Moses teaches Israel a poetic song in which the steadfast faithfulness of the Lord is contrasted with the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of His people in the past and prophetically in the future; also revealing the Lord’s just vengeance on Israel’s (and His) enemies and his compassionate justification of His people and His cleansing of their land.

**Proposition:** Worship the Lord in humility, thankfulness and joy knowing that the gospel of God’s faithful, steadfast love for His rebellious, unthankful and foolish people is revealed in the song of Moses.

**Introduction**

Modern educational research has identified the fact that different people learn best in different ways. One education model had four ‘learning-style’ categories:

* **Visual learners** who receive information best in meaningful symbols that they can see with their own eyes.
* **Auditory learners** who take in instruction best as they hear it.
* **Reading learners** who process data best when it comes to them in the written word.
* **Kinaesthetic (**relating to a person's awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body) **leaners** are hands-on practical, tactile learners who are best instructed through activities in which they are physically engaged.

You may well be able to identify yourself in one of these four groups. For most of us we have a combination of these different learning styles, although often one is most dominant for each person. These different modes of learning for human beings point to the complexity of the Lord’s design of all those made in His image (Ps 139:14).

As we look back over the ways in which the Lord had communicated with His people Israel, we can see that He had provided for the range of human ‘learning styles’. For example:

* He had appeared as a pillar of cloud outside the Tent of Meeting when Joshua was commissioned as the leader to succeed Moses (31:15).
* He had spoken through Moses as this servant of God ‘undertook to explain’ the law of God (1:5). This sermon makes up most of the content of the book of Deuteronomy.
* The Lord had commanded that His law be written down in a book and placed by the side of the ark of the covenant (32:26).
* Throughout their years in the wilderness, the people touched the miraculous manna which the Lord provided and had clothes and sandals next to their skin that never wore out (29:5).

The Lord used many means to communicate to His people who He is and what He had done, was doing and would do for them. God conveys His glorious grace in many different ways so that we might learn to love Him, to respond to Him, to trust Him and to obey Him.

In our text today, the Lord reveals the good news of His salvation in a poetic song which Moses, together with Joshua (32:44) taught to the people (31:19,30). One of the strong themes of this ‘Song of Moses’ is the image of arock– a metaphor to describe the strength and stability of God. We’re going to look at this poetic song which was a witness for the Lord against the people of Israel (31:19) under four headings:

1. Worship the Rock
2. Be humbled by the Rock
3. Be thankful to the Rock
4. Rejoice with the Rock
5. **Worship the Rock (v1-14)**

North Canterbury and Banks Peninsula suffered a severe drought in late summer earlier this year. When there is a prolonged period of many years of drought, unless there is sufficient irrigation, the land gradually becomes a desert. A desert is a dry, arid place in which there is little, if any, vegetation. The wilderness areas where the Israelites had wandered for 40 years were dry desert places.

As he begins his song, Moses calls the sky and the earth to witness what he will say and he likens his words to life-giving water: “*May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distil as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb*” (v2). Like water in a dry land, the words of this song bring life to all those who will listen to them.

Firstly, they praise the Lord God with these poetic lyrics: “*For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he*” (v3-4). Here ‘The Rock’ is a name for the Lord God. It is a name which appears multiple times in this song (vv 15, 18, 30) being a metaphor which conveys strength, stability, permanence and faithfulness.

These are not abstract theoretical attributes of the Lord, but realities which Israel herself had experienced. He had chosen Israel for His treasured possession (Deut 7:6) (‘Jacob his allotted heritage’ v9), cherishing His people and delivering them from the barrenness of slavery in Egypt. Listen to the poetry which describes what the Lord had already done for His people: "*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*” (v10). Just as the central pupil of the eye is to be protected against harm, so the Lord shielded and watched over Israel.

“*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*” (v11-12). Like a powerful eagle who teaches her young how to fly, so the Lord had carefully instructed His people how to live. Eagles sometimes throw their young offspring from the nest and then swoop down to allow the young bird to be caught on its mother’s wings. This is a powerful image of the way in which the Lord delivered His people from the false ‘security’ of Egypt to utter dependence on Him alone in the wilderness. This is also how the Lord disciplines us, strengthening us through trial so that we grow in spiritual resilience and fruitfulness (Heb 12:11).

Now the song moves into the future conquest of the Promised Land: “*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*” (13-14). In contrast to the barrenness of the desert, the land of Canaan would be highly productive with good food and drink. Israel would be blessed to be the dominant nation there.

The Lord is worthy of worship because He always acts perfectly without iniquity, with faithfulness and justice. He blesses His people with gifts which they do not deserve. The Israelites experienced the stable faithfulness of their Lord as He led them from Egypt, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Brothers and sisters, we have experienced the stable faithfulness of our Lord has He has delivered us from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son Jesus (Col 1:13). Let us remember to worship the Lord our Rock and also to be humbled by Him, which brings us to our second point:

1. **Be humbled by the Rock (v15-25, 26-27)**

The song now shifts from the person and work of the Rock to the people’s response to the gracious work of their God. In this poem, Israel is referred to by the name ‘Jeshurun’ in the prophesy that follows: "*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*” (v15). In the future, yet to unfold, having received great gifts from God, Israel would then turn her back on her Lord, the faithful Rock. Israel would turn to idols, to false gods, forgetting the steadfast love of their God who had chosen them, delivered them and prospered them. “*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*” (v16-18).

The faithful just and perfectly upright Lord would be provoked to righteous anger by the idolatry of Israel. He would ‘*hide his face from them*’ (v20) so that they would no longer be blessed by His Fatherly care. They would suffer the covenant curses of disasters, hunger, plague, poisonous pestilence. They would be attacked by wild animals and snakes (v23-24). There would be warfare outside and heartfelt personal terror for all people whatever age or stage of life (v25). Israel should have been wise enough to see that the only reason they were able to conquer the Promised Land in the face of stronger and more numerous enemies was that ‘*their rock is not as our Rock*’ (v31). Yet Israel would show herself to be a ‘*nation void of counsel*’ with no understanding (v28).

The recorded history of Israel in the Bible is very different from the ancient records of the deeds which the surrounding nations wrote about themselves. The leaders of these pagan nations would always portray themselves as mighty heroes. Here the true character, ingratitude, stupidity and sin of Israel is revealed in painful, embarrassing detail. Why? So that they would see themselves as they truly were and be humbled by the Lord their Rock.

As we heard from 1 Corinthians 10 ‘*these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come*’ (v11). The Lord humbles us when we see the ways in which we have foolishly turned away from Him.

Are you humbled by the Lord, the Rock today as you look back on your life?

Having been humbled, Israel would then turn back to the Lord, their only source of lasting strength, joy and blessing, which brings us to our third point:

1. **Be thankful to the Rock (v26-27, 34-42)**

As we’ve seen, this song looks forward in time to a future when Israel would turn from their God to worship and serve idols and as a consequence come under the judgement of their Lord, the mighty Rock. The instruments of that judgement would be the enemies of both Israel and her Lord. Looking back at the history of Israel, we know that the Lord used the fierce Assyrians as the ‘*rod of His anger*’ against His own people (Isa 10:5). We also know that the Lord later used the Babylonians, a ‘*bitter and hasty nation, dreaded and fearsome*’ (Hab 1:6; 7) to bring swift judgement on the southern tribes, taking them into captivity.

It was not that these pagan nations were in any way commendable in the sight of the Lord. This song reveals their evil nature in this poetic language: “*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*” (v32-33). These wicked peoples would not escape the just and upright judgement of the Lord who reveals in this song: “*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*” (v35).

There is a comfort in knowing that the guilty will not escape justice. When we hear of atrocious crimes, especially against the vulnerable in our society and abroad we deeply desire that the guilty would be judged for their wickedness. The words of Psalm 94:1-2 express this: “*O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve!*”. The sure knowledge that God will right all wrongs in His perfect judgement is the reason that the Apostle Paul gives to the Romans not to seek their own revenge (Rom 12:19). It is the reason why we are called to do good to our enemies and in so doing not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21).

Knowing that God, the Rock, is just and upright is a reason to be thankful, but there is more! “*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*” (v36). When Israel reaches their lowest point, when they have no strength remaining, then the Lord will be moved to pity and will ‘vindicate’ them. He will clear them of blame and show them to be justified as He judges them. This memorable song of Moses does not explain how this will take place. At that stage in history, the fullness of God’s plan remained a mystery. We know that it is in Christ that the Lord has vindicated His people and has had compassion on them.

So often in life it is only when our own strength and resources have gone, or almost gone, that we see most clearly our need of the Lord, our Rock. This is part of the blessing of the suffering of sickness, loss, grief and loneliness. It can be part of the blessing which comes with this pandemic, this lockdown, this time of uncertainty. As Peter confessed to Jesus on behalf of His disciples: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God*." (John 6:68-69).

About 1500 years before the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth, the Lord God instructed His servant Moses to write a memorable gospel song which points forward in time to the person and work of His Son. God vindicates His people by placing their sin on Jesus and judging Him in their place. In His great compassion, God credits the perfect obedience of Christ to His law to their account so that they are justified before Him.

In the words of the gospel song by Don Moen:

*“Give thanks with a grateful heart*

*Give thanks to the Holy One*

*Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son”*

Fourthly and finally, rejoice with the Rock:

1. **Rejoice with the Rock (v43)**

Do you like sad songs or happy songs? Would you say that the ‘song of Moses’ is happy or sad? Surely it is both. It is a source of deep joy to know that even though we live in a world with much injustice, wickedness and brokenness, the Lord God is steadfast and steady, perfectly just and faithful. It is very sad though to see and accept how much like Old Testament Israel we all are.

It is sad to admit that we are prone to receive the rich blessings of the Lord and then to forget the Giver. It is sad to know that some of the difficulties and distresses we experience in life are a consequence of our own idolatry; that is giving people and things first priority in our lives, rather than ensuring that our first love is always the Lord our Rock. It is sad to think of how much it cost Christ Jesus so that we who trust in Him could be vindicated and counted righteous by God the Rock.

Yet it is a cause of great joy to know that the Lord will bring complete and perfect justice at the end of this age and that He will restore their homeland. We see this revealed in the last part of this song *"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."* (v43).

The Hebrew word translated ‘cleanse’ here is very significant. It literally means to ‘cover over’, ‘to pacify’, ‘to make atonement’. This rich term conveys the very heart of the gospel. To ‘make atonement’ is to cover over sin so that it is hidden from God’s sight. To ‘make atonement’ is to pardon and forgive thereby restoring a relationship which had been broken. Here to ‘make atonement’ is to remove the barrier of sin and between God the perfect Rock and His sinful people.

We know from the history of Israel that they failed to cleanse the land of Canaan of the idols there but instead became ensnared by them. We know that as a consequence of their idolatry, the land was devastated by warfare and destruction. Here in this ‘gospel song’ is the promise of restoration – a promise which will ultimately find fulfilment in the New Heavens and New Earth. Not only will this land be a perfectly balanced paradise, cleansed from the disease, distress and death which plagues our world today, it will also be cleansed from the pollution of sin which infects us all. This cleansing comes through the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross at Calvary.

The song of Moses points all who will hear this sad and joyful song to Christ in whom these poetic lyrics find their ultimate fulfilment. Jesus is the One who is going to return to this earth and who will ‘*judge the living and the dead*’ (Acts 10:42).

Brothers and sisters, rejoice with Christ Jesus who is our spiritual Rock (1 Cor 10:4). His work is perfect, all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. Worship Christ the Rock. He is worthy of all praise. Be humbled by Christ the Rock. His light illuminates your darkness so that you move towards the Light of the World. Be thankful to Christ the Rock. He loved you before you first loved Him. Rejoice with Christ the Rock. He has prepared a perfectly clean eternal home for you together with Himself and all His people.

AMEN.