

**Text:** Dt 28.15, 28-29; Ps 146

It may seem strange to begin our Christmas series the way I am today, but the place we are starting is really always the starting place. We are going to talk about blindness, spiritual blindness especially. We are going to describe the human race as spiritually blind – groping about for some solution to life's problems but not finding any.

Merry Christmas!

The fact is that in our culture, everyone [pretty well] celebrates Christmas. They are at least aware of it. How can you escape it? The stores start telling you in August, it seems. Christmas, including the word 'Christ,' is on everyone's lips. But almost everyone is blind to what that means. And they like to be blind.

Again, merry Christmas!

So when we start talking about Christmas, invariably we start with the fall of man, or some related topic – the depravity of man, the position of man as already condemned. The human condition is the issue, no one can escape it, and all are doomed to face the judgement attendant upon it.

We are going to talk about the fall today, but first we are going to talk about **Israel**. Israel is **pivotal** for world history – **the incubus of the Saviour, the exemplars of divine grace, the people of God**. We are going to begin by talking about the covenant God made with Israel and in particular about one of the curses for disobedience. We are going to see that Israel [and all mankind] are in a state of blindness on account of their own choices and by the deliberate judging hand of God.

Read Dt 28.1-20, 28-29, text v. 15, 28-29, Ps 146.8

**Proposition:** The need for a Saviour stems from man's failure and God's decrees.

## **I. The condition of the covenant nation anticipated**

### **A. General concept of the Mosaic covenant**

1. A point of confusion: the notion that OT saints are saved by the keeping of the law

- a. Stems from a misunderstanding of at least one OT passage:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Leviticus 18.5** 'So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.

- 1) There may be other passages that say essentially the same thing
- 2) The question is, what does this promise mean by 'live'?

- b. Consider a few other OT passages:

<sup>NAU</sup> Deuteronomy 4.40 "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."

<sup>NAU</sup> Deuteronomy 30.16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.

- 1) What kind of life is in view here?
    - a) A life of bearing children
    - b) A life on the land
  - 2) A physical life, not eternal life
2. How are OT saints saved? (Gen 15.6)

<sup>NAU</sup> **Genesis 15.6** Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

- a. Faith and always faith
  - b. Faith and only faith
3. The positive section of Dt 28 confirms this (1-14)
- a. High above the nations of the earth (1)

- b. Blessed in offspring (4a)
- c. Blessed in produce of ground (4b)
- d. Increase of the herd and flock (4c)
- e. Your basket and kneading bowl (5)
- f. Victory in armed conflict (7)
- g. And so on

The purpose of this is so that the other nations will see what God does to a people who follow him and are blessed by him (10)

- Consider the incredible blessing of the Exodus in the first place, and what the nations thought
- Consider God's grace in revealing his will so carefully to his people: so that they might know how to live separately from the nations

- 4. Consider what Israel would have been like if she had been able to live as God intended (12-13) 
- 5. Last point on the general concept of the covenant
  - a. In this chapter it is set up like a 'suzerainty' treaty
    - 1) A suzerainty treaty is one where a stronger nation dominates a weaker nation, but allows self-government and demands tribute money
    - 2) Typically, these arrangements are spelled out in treaties, that sound just like Dt 28
  - b. Another characteristic of these treaties is that the cursing section is longer than the blessing section
    - 1) Here: blessing, 1-14; cursing 15-68

- 2) Reason: “The reason was probably to stress the seriousness of violating the covenant by describing the consequences in detail.”<sup>1</sup>

## B. Anticipations of the Mosaic covenant for blindness

1. Specific interest for our study: the inclusion of the curse of blindness (28-29)
2. Characteristics of this blindness
  - a. The blindness is primarily spiritual (28)
    - 1) “madness and blindness and bewilderment of heart” – both of the coordinating terms have to do with psychological or spiritual aspects of life
    - 2) Physical blindness surely is a product of the fall, and thus, ultimately, of human sin – but it only illustrates spiritual blindness
  - b. The blindness is spiritually defeating (29)
    - 1) “Grove at noon”
    - 2) “Will not prosper in your ways”
    - 3) “Oppressed and robbed continually”
    - 4) “No one to save you”

The state of a physically blind person is a tremendous handicap; but a spiritually blind person is doubly lost:

- Lost because of his own willful disobedience (15)
- Lost because of God’s judicial decree (28-29)

## C. Realization of the curses of the covenant in history

1. The curses came into play almost immediately after Moses’ departure
2. Brief reprieve under the leadership of Joshua

<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 28.1–15.

3. But then comes the Judges, as we have been seeing on Sunday afternoons
4. And after that the kings: a few good, most bad, and the nation generally struggling with idolatry in all its forms
  - a. Nation divided as a consequence of breach of covenant
  - b. Nation exiled as a consequence of breach of covenant
5. Even the returning exiles failed, because though they eschewed idolatry, they made an idol of the law, concluding that by keeping the Law they might be saved (spiritual salvation, not just physical) — this is Pharisaism

This brief history brings us right into the time of Christ and the increasing opposition he experienced from his own people.

## II. A metaphor for all mankind

### A. Compare Israel with Adam (Gen 2.16-17)

1. In a sense, the instruction concerning the tree is very similar (though briefer) to the Mosaic covenant
2. Like a suzerainty treaty, man is given autonomy, with certain restrictions
3. Breach of the treaty means incurring certain penalties

### B. Consider the condition of Adam's children

1. The wide array of human religion
  - a. Study of religion tries to generalize, but there are many, many groups and sub-groups
  - b. Broadly speaking, there are four major religions world-wide:
    - 1) Christianity
    - 2) Islam
    - 3) Hinduism
    - 4) Buddhism

c. There are an additional 10 significantly large religions

- 1) Shinto
- 2) Sikhism
- 3) Judaism
- 4) Korean shamanism
- 5) Caodaism [Vietnam]
- 6) Bahá'í Faith
- 7) Jainism [India]
- 8) Cheondoism [Korea]
- 9) Hoahaoism [Vietnam]
- 10) Tenriism [Japan]

d. There are many subgroups and many countless smaller tribal religions of all kinds

One fellow said to me the other day, "All religions are man-made."

- Generally speaking, that is true, except not all, all but one
- But even in that one, Christianity, there are countless sects and divisions and individuals who do not practice Biblical Christianity
- So to that extent, even in Christianity, so-called, religion is man-made

2. Why is human religion man-made?

<sup>NAU</sup> **Deuteronomy 28.28-29** "The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart; <sup>29</sup> and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you.

They are subject to spiritual blindness, they are groping in the dark, they are oppressed and robbed continually, and they have no one to save them.

But wait... there is a saviour! Turn to Ps 146

### III. Celebration of the only cure (Ps 146)

- A. It's personal: "I will praise the Lord" (1-2)
- B. He is able: the God of Jacob (3-7)
- C. He alone opens blind eyes (8)
  - 1. Notice the beginning of each line from 7c to 9a: the LORD – YHWH, Jehovah
  - 2. The God of the Exodus
  - 3. The God of the incarnation: Yehoshua; Yeshua; Jesus "Jehovah saves"

#### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The need for a Saviour stems from man's failure and God's decrees.

But praise the Lord, the God who decreed also planned the salvation.

Matthew Henry: "There is no running from God but by running to him, no fleeing from his justice but by fleeing to his mercy."<sup>2</sup>

You cannot escape the blindness by groping about for your own solution.

You must come to God, the Lord, the only one by whose touch your eyes will be opened.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 272.