

Zebulun and Issachar

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 June 2014

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn now for a short time to the Old Testament and words you'll find in Deuteronomy chapter 33. The book of Deuteronomy chapter 33 and verses 18 and 19.

And of Zebulun, he said, rejoice Zebulun in your going out and Issachar in your tents. They shall call peoples to their mountain, there they offer right sacrifices.

For they draw from the abundance of the seas and the hidden treasures of the sand. There is a connection, I hope we'll see it before we finish, between this and the passage read in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and similar passages.

This is a great chapter where Moses blesses the people of Israel shortly before his own death and in anticipation of them entering into the land that God promised them.

And you notice how Moses at the beginning of the chapter is described as the man of God. The only other place in the Old Testament that he's called the man of God is in the title to Psalm number 90.

[1 : 20] A prayer of Moses, the man of God. And very often in the Old Testament that phrase goes along with someone who exercises the office of a prophet.

Someone whom God has appointed to announce God's word. And especially to announce the way that God promises his people's future and comes to set out for them things which center on his covenant.

And that fits very well of course with the chapter here because Moses is going through all the tribes that he lists here as the people of Israel are formed into their tribes.

And as a prophet, as someone that God has endowed to bring this blessing to the people to announce things about each of the tribes that has to do with their present but also of their future. Moses is in fact exercising this position as the man of God the prophet that God is actually through whom God is announcing these things for his people.

[2 : 28] The content of this blessing is full of things that happen to belong to God's people and in many ways distinguishes them from other peoples.

And we're not going to go into it except these two verses but you notice that it begins there in the first few verses, verses 2-6 with 2-5 with a summary by Moses of the history of their redemption very briefly.

But it's emphasizing of course the importance of Mount Sinai as the mount on which God came to reveal himself and at which he gave the law to his people.

And how that was where God became king in Jespern when the heads of the people were gathered all the tribes of Israel together. God had always been their king of course but he presented himself through the incident on Mount Sinai as the glorious king of his people who was marching ahead of them and in the midst through the wilderness.

And the blessing in the chapter concludes by again another kind of summary just picking up all the blessings that he's mentioned there but particularly emphasizing God that there is none like this God of Jeshurun who rides through the heavens to your help.

[3 : 45] The eternal God is your dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms. And then happy are you O Israel who is like unto you a people saved by the Lord the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph.

Your enemies shall come fawning to you and you shall tread upon their backs. So it finishes there again with a great note of anticipated victory for the people under the blessing of God.

So if we turn to these verses 18 and 19 just to pick these out. The two tribes that are mentioned here Zebulun and Issachar. And you notice immediately how they are tied together in these two verses under the one blessing for these tribes as their twin if you like under what Moses says

concerning them.

These were the two final sons of Leah by their father Jacob. And here together Zebulun and Issachar are put together in a way that first of all shows a marked difference between them. But then secondly as you read through verse 19 despite that marked difference they have a common purpose or aim in their activity.

[5 : 08] Because the difference first of all is rejoice Zebulun and Issachar in your going out and Issachar in your tents. In other words the first tribe Zebulun is mentioned as the going out tribe.

The second one Issachar is mentioned as the staying at home tribe or rather a tribe that is more settled in one particular place.

And in the history of the tribes Zebulun became the tribe associated with merchant ship with access to the sea. Which is why it mentions here the drawing from the abundance of the seas.

Zebulun is regarded as an outgoing tribe. A tribe that needs to go beyond where it lives in order to actually gather some produce and provisions that God has made for it.

Whereas Issachar on the other hand are spoken of as being in their tents. Issachar was more an agricultural type of tribe that made use of the land where they were.

[6 : 14] And therefore their provision from God was in that respect confined to their own immediate locality. So there's the difference between the two tribes immediately mentioned as one that is going out and another that's mentioned as in your tents or staying at home.

We can call them the going out tribe and the stay at home tribe. And that really is representative in many respects of what you find in God's church in every generation.

And what you find in every congregation of God's church like our own congregation here tonight. Because there are various gifts and callings, various parts to the whole body as God himself has arranged it.

This arrangement that was given to the tribes with regard to where they would settle, what kind of activities they'd be engaging in. They didn't actually invent that for themselves.

They didn't create this for themselves. They didn't say to God, we think it would be a good idea if we were the going out tribe. But Issachar would be the stay at home tribe. God did this.

[7 : 27] God arranged it. God arranged all the tribes in their own localities, in their own activities within the one people of Israel in the one land of Canaan.

You had the variety that God had built into the tribes within the unity that God had also brought about by bringing in the Asa people to inhabit this inheritance that he had prepared for them and gifted to them.

That is how it is precisely with the church as well. You remember as we read in 1 Corinthians 12, the way that Paul puts it in such a remarkable way and such an easy way to remember.

Picturing the spiritual body of Christ just as the natural body is. Where he says that in the natural body just because if the fruit should say because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body.

That would not make it any less a part of the body. But then it goes on even more importantly to say the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you.

[8 : 36] Not again the head to the feet. I have no need of you. So that you are the bodies of Christ and individually members of it.

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, then prophets and so on. Now he is speaking there and writing to the Corinthian church. His people as they were called by the name of God in Corinth.

And Corinth had become a congregation or a church divided. A church that had its own cliques. A church that had rivalries. A church that had infighting.

A church that did not accept necessarily the gifts that some had, others would be jealous of. All of that had come about in this church at Corinth. And Paul addressed them at times very severely.

And at one time said to them, with all of these divisions, with all of these rivalries, with all of these groupings, you are acting like little children. You are not acting with maturity as you ought.

[9 : 43] And in that imagery of the body of Christ, that is what we find following into the church's position, our own situation today.

Some are going out Christians. Some are staying at home Christians. What we mean by that is, not everybody is designed for the same activity in God's church in the gospel.

Not everybody is good at interacting with people. At presenting the gospel face-to-face personally to people. Not everyone is cut out to preach the gospel. Not everyone can be an elder.

Not everyone can actually engage in some more practical activities. Where people are actually visited or whatever in a way that some people are gifted for.

There are a whole host of different callings. But they all exist together inside the one body of Christ. Issachar could not say to Zebulun, because you are the going out tribe, I don't need you.

[10:47] Neither could Zebulun say to Issachar, because you are staying at home, we don't think you are pulling your weight. It is simply the way God has arranged it for the good of the whole.

As Paul says, exactly the same to the Corinthians as well. And in that respect, it is really important to notice that word, rejoice. Because the word rejoice applies both to Zebulun and to Issachar in their different activities in the way God has appointed them differently.

It is not rejoice Zebulun in your going out. And Issachar, you will be in your tents. What it is saying is, rejoice Zebulun in your going out, and rejoice Issachar in your tents.

That is where you find the rejoicing to actually cover both of the tribes in their lot. There is to be no jealousy on the part of the one for what the others have been given by God to do and to be.

There is to be no rivalry on the part of Issachar just because they are not the going out tribes. They are to rejoice in God's apportionment of their gifts.

[12:05] And in many ways that is one of the secrets of the unity of God's people living together, working together, in harmony together.

That each rejoices not only in what God has given them to do, but rejoices in the way God has gifted others to do things different to themselves.

That we rejoice in that way is very much part of how the unity of God's people together serves the gospel. And just look at the variety that is here tonight.

Not all of you work with young people. Not all of you would be good working with older people. There is a whole history of backgrounds and different qualities and gifts as God has appointed, as God has created.

In each and every member of the body, there is something that distinguishes them from other members of the body. Each and every one has their own personality. Each and every one has their own place, has their own position, has their own activity within the overall activity of God's people.

[13:19] And we are told, rejoice in that. Rejoice in the variety that God has built into his body. Rejoice in what God has given you to do.

But rejoice in what God has given others to do as well. There is one of the things that must follow us through into our activities and into our seeking to maintain, as Paul puts it elsewhere, the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace.

There is the great challenge for us tonight. Am I happy just because somebody else gets more prominence publicly in the things of the church and the things of God than I do?

Am I happy to take a back seat if that is what God wants me to do? Am I happy to actually rejoice in that variety that God has created in the richness of his body, the richness of this grace that he has bestowed to make this variety into a great unity of people?

Here is the great prophet Moses going through all of these tribes in their turn, here saying of Zebulun and Issachar. And yet at the end of it all, he says, happy are you, O Israel.

[14:37] He is not now looking at each of the tribes in the variety that he mentions all the way through his announcement of blessing. He is saying, that's what I have said, this is what I am seeing as a prophet of God, all of that variety of you in your tribes, all of your activities different, yet rejoicing in one another, and you are one people.

And who is like you? O Israel, happy are you. You could say that means blessed as well. A people saved by the Lord. It's a great privilege to be given something by God to do.

To be able to say of ourselves, well, this is what God has given me to do. It's not the same as what somebody else has. It's maybe not very prominent at all.

Maybe, in fact, it's something hardly anybody sees or hardly anybody knows. It doesn't matter. Rejoice in it. And rejoice in what God has given others to do as well.

So rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out. And rejoice, Issachar, in your tents. The imagery of the body is actually there in the distinctness of the two tribes and in the way that God has different things for them that they must both rejoice in.

[16:04] But then, secondly, there's a common purpose to it all. When you go to verse 19, They shall call peoples to their mountain. There they shall offer right sacrifices, or literally it's sacrifices of righteousness.

For there they draw from the abundance of the seas. That seems to refer to Zebulun. And the hidden treasures of the sand seems to refer to Issachar. It's not very easy to know exactly what it means by the hidden treasures of the sand.

But it's to do with Issachars staying in their tents and working the land, it seems, and drawing from the land the produce that it itself is able to bring forth.

So that's, again, what is said. So there are three things in the common purpose. Together, even though one's going out and the other's in their tents, they shall call peoples to their mountain. They both shall call peoples to their mountain. They both together shall call peoples to their mountain. The mountain that's mentioned there seems to be what elsewhere in the Bible you find called the mountain of the Lord.

[17 : 25] Which as the Bible's revelation goes on down to the years of the Old Testament, when you reach the likes of Isaiah, that frequently mentions the mountain of the Lord, then it becomes more obvious that it is an anticipation of the kingdom of Christ.

The mountain of the Lord where the worship of God is focused and centered, where the people of God are gathered by him as his people to be his people, to be his worshippers.

The mountain of the Lord is where the blessing of the Lord is situated, and where it's associated with, which is associated with God's presence, and God's being with his people.

So that if you look at it that way, what it's saying is, they shall call peoples to their mountain. In other words, they have a common purpose, Issachar in their staying in their tents, and Zebulun in their going out.

They join together, though they are different in their activities, their activities really come to the same thing in a sense, because they are given from God the instruction that they are to call peoples to their mountain.

[18 : 34] They are to be in the business of calling people to where the Lord is to be found. They are to be in the business of calling people to the worship of God, to the sanctuary of God, to the kingdom of God, to where God is king, to where the true God is as they know him.

And of course that fits in with Israel being so exclusive. Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? And one of the great features, sadly, where Israel so often failed, down through the Old Testament years, one of the great features that God mentions about them is that they were meant to be a people that brought the Lord to the pagan nations around them, and brought the pagan nations to consider the Lord, and how different that God was to the gods of the Canaanites, and the gods of the Amorites, and the gods of the Hittites, and the gods of Babylon, and the gods of Assyria.

Which is why it was such a desperately serious thing, that instead of showing the distinctness of their God, the uniqueness of their God, and their uniqueness as God's people, they actually brought in many of these other gods into their practices.

And you'll find that's happening, of course, today as well. Where instead of maintaining that distinctness, and that uniqueness for God, for Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, for God's redeemed people to have a particular lifestyle laid down from in the scriptures that God has specified, instead of that, it's opened up, it's made more liberal, it's actually imported many other forms of behavior, of ways, of lifestyle, and tacked them on to the Christian way, and the Christian lifestyle, and broadened it out, so that it's now said to be respectful.

Well, Israel failed, and the church has failed at other times, and there are aspects in which the church fails today. When we're saying that, of course, it's dangerous, because we're always liable to give the impression that we are the pure ones, that we are top of the league, that we are the best Christians in the world.

[21 : 03] That's not why we're saying this, but we're saying it because we do know decline to have taken place in our own generation, and that we see it in our own land, in terms of the church in our land.

And when God here said to Issachar and to Zebulun to rejoice in that going out, and to rejoice in their tents, it was so that the task that God gave them would be carried out, to call peoples to their mountain.

And it was in order that they offered their sacrifices of righteousness. Why do we gather like this on a Wednesday evening?

Why do we gather on the Lord's Day? It's in order to offer sacrifices of righteousness. It's in order to worship our God.

It's in order to bring to God the offerings that are due to Him. On the basis of what Christ has done as the sacrifice, we offer sacrifices of righteousness, in the sense in which we, based upon the sacrifice of Christ, we offer our spiritual sacrifices of worship to Him.

[22 : 20] And it's something that is very important for us to remember. We worship God in the way that He has specified.

Israel were not allowed, or shouldn't have brought, other aspects of what they called worship, from pagan practices, into the worship of Jehovah God.

And that is also to be the case with ourselves. The danger is in times of decline, and you know this very well yourselves, but the Bible mentions it so frequently that we have to try and always carry it with us into the situation that we face, because we're facing such times of decline, and times when it's so difficult to persuade people to consider the gospel, or to come to gospel services, or to come to things even associated with the church's ministry in the gospel, even if it's not an actual service, the danger is that we'll try things which are just new, and which are according to our own minds, which we might think would actually be attractive to people.

In other words, we get carried along the line of what are called things like seeker-friendly services. We could decide as a church session that for the whole of next month we wouldn't have a sermon in the morning service, we would have a play, we would have drama, we would have something like that, and that's bound to attract people in.

But that's not what defines worship. We don't define worship in accordance with what we think might be attractive to people outside of the church. We define worship in the way God has defined it.

[24 : 06] God has actually specified the elements of worship, that there is to be praise, that there is to be reading of his word, that there is to be announcement in terms of gospel preaching, that there is to be prayer.

And we're not at liberty to then say, ah, but that doesn't attract people in. When we were in London, just for a very short break after the assembly, ah, one of the things that we did was, ah, we went to that great shop called Harold's.

Didn't buy anything there, but it was just a kind of speck, just to see what's it like. And, of course, it was very expensive.

And, I remember one, I don't remember much about what was there really, it was just totally beyond us anyway, but, a gent's coat, a designer coat, a coat that only a designer would design, um, three thousand pounds.

And to look at, personally, I would have said, I wouldn't actually wear that, not even down walking in the glebe. It was such a horrible looking thing.

[25 : 32] Totally unattractive to me, personally, but to a designer or somebody in the, um, fashionista world, that, of course, would be probably very attractive.

Well, what I'm saying is this, you can have designer services, but the gospel will not be attractive to those who are dead in trespasses and sins until God changes their hearts.

That's the only thing that is going to make the gospel attractive, and we can change and tinker around with things like worship, and things like the emphasis that we lay in the preaching of the gospel or take it out altogether, whatever it is.

But the one thing that we will not change is people's distaste for the claims of Christ until he opens their heart.

That does not mean that we actually are quite happy with dead worship, that we don't actually engage in a worship that shows joy, joy, that has expression of what we believe in our heart, a joy that's not afraid of emotion and showing emotion in the right manner and to the right degree when that is on our heart to do so.

[26 : 52] We're not talking about a dead orthodoxy and a dead worship, but we are saying that to the dead the worship of God is always going to be dead until he brings them alive.

And what God has said here to Zebulun and to Issaachah is you will call people to the mountain of the Lord. You will call them to this mountain where God is situated.

That's your business. That's what God has set as your great task. So there's where they come together. They're so different. One's going out, the other's in their tents, but they have a common purpose.

They shall call people to their mountain. That's the business of your Christian life and my Christian life as well. Just because you're not a minister doesn't mean that's not your responsibility and your remit.

Just because I am a minister doesn't mean I don't fit into that practical side of things as well. We are called to actually bring to the notice of people that there's a mountain of the Lord.

[28 : 10] And that means in a whole different way of doing it, but the fact of the matter is that's the primary aim. Getting people to think about God and his claim upon them and their need of him.

And it reminds us too that the church is a worshipping community. The church of God is a worshipping community.

In fact, you could say that everything else in a sense is directed towards that. Every other activity is directed towards that. That's why wherever we are with people and whatever steps we need to take people through in order to finally get them to attend the gospel and the preaching of the gospel and the worship of God with his people.

That is the aim. That is the goal. Not to actually keep things at the level of pre-church meetings or pre-church fellowships or pre-church courses.

They are all well and good. They are great. They are necessary. There's nothing at all wrong with that. But they're not the end. They are not the final terminus for us as a people or for those that we're wanting to work with or to engage with.

[29 : 30] It is to bring people to join with us in the worshipping of God. That's what the primary emphasis in the church's activity is.

They are a people who worship God. They are a worshipping community. You shall call people to their mountain.

They are they offer sacrifices of righteousness. Because after all when this world is done in many senses that's when perfect worship begins.

Because heaven is a worshipping community. It begins here. In the people of God as they are united in this world by him.

And whatever gifts we all have and however different we are and however much we may be going out or staying in our tents or whatever that is in regard to our personal gifts and the varieties of our callings.

[30 : 37] We come together in terms of being a worshipping people of God. And one thing people must never ever be able to say about us is that we are not a worshipping people.

They must never be able to say about us these people have become tired of worship. They have become jaded in their worship of Christ. Christ. The Emperor Trajan in the Roman Empire writing to Pliny, it was one of his servants elsewhere in the Roman Empire, writing to Trajan described Christians as these people who worship a God by the name of Jesus.

That's how they were distinguished. That's how this pagan official regarded them. That was his main description of them. A people who worship Christ as a God.

If we walk from one end of point to the other, it would be good if people said of us all along the way, these are the people who worship Christ as a God.

Whatever they think of it, whatever their own view of it is, may they always have to say that about you and me. That we worship God.

[32 : 16] That that's our prime activity in life. to worship God. And then he goes on to speak about the resources.

For they draw from the abundance of the seas and the hidden treasures of the sand. Just very briefly. What does that actually mean? Well, it means that God's provision for them fits in with the task that he's given them.

The tribe of Zebulun, they're drawing from the abundance of the seas, the others from the hidden treasures of the sand. And you could take it that that's an explanation of why they have to call people to the mountain of the Lord because what they want to do is people to come and share with them in the provision that God has made for them.

The riches of that provision. That's one way of taking the second half of verse 19. Or you could take it, and it's just as good to take it this way, I think that what it means is that from the abundance that God provides for them, whether it's from the sea or from the land, when you think about the spiritual meaning of that, from the provision that God gives to them, not only are they fed and they nourished, but they are equipped for the task that is given them to call people to the mountain of the

Lord.

You see, tonight we're feeding on the richness that Christ himself is in the gospel. We're feeding on the richness of that salvation that we have in Jesus Christ.

[33 : 52] Out of the abundance of that store, we are being nourished. Why? Well, to feed our souls, yes.

To build ourselves up personally in spiritual strength and vitality, yes. But it's also to enable you and to be equipped and to strengthen you to call people to the mountain of the Lord.

You're not strengthened and nourished just to keep it to yourself. You're strengthened and you're nourished because you have to go and exercise your calling.

And you won't exercise your calling except as you are nourished. Because if you become weak, and I become weak and famished and spindly Christians, we're not going to be very fit to call people to the mountains of the Lord, to the mountain of the Lord, to the kingdom of Christ, to the blessings of the gospel, because they tell us, go and feed yourself first.

We feed upon the richness of the gospel so that we will be robust and strong and well-rounded, well-guarded, good living Christians, so that we will call people, whatever way God has gifted us, to the mountain of the Lord.

[35 : 23] So there's the difference, and there's the common purpose, the calling of people to the Lord, and the calling of people to the Lord to focus on the worship of God and the offering of sacrifices of righteousness, righteousness, and being equipped for that, from the abundance of God's provision, as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15, therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, be movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know that your labor is never in vain in the Lord.

Let's pray. Almighty and eternal God, we thank you that the richness that you provide for us is there abundantly for us, that it is there freely for us to take off as we come to delight ourselves in God.

This is your promise to us, O Lord, in your word. Delight yourself in God, and he will give you the desire of your heart. Trust in him, and he will bring forth your righteousness even as the noonday.

Bless us, we pray, as we once more come under the teaching of your word. Lord, we ask that it will further equip us and move us and motivate us towards the calling of others to be a people who consider the Lord, who worship the Lord, and one who is glorious in holiness and is always to be praised.

Bless us then, we pray here and in our party, and in all of these things, take all the praise and glory to your name. Pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen.■