

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



March 25, 2012

God's Banished Ones

The story of God's plan for saving us from our sins was summarized in the words of a wise woman to King David long before the plan was fulfilled.

"For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him" (2 Sam. 14:14).

These words were spoken by the wise woman of Tekoa to David, urging him to reach out to Absalom, who had gone into exile for the murder of Amnon. Her message to David was that he needed to reconcile with his son while he still had opportunity to do so.

But her appeal to David was based on a theme with which David was very familiar: God's forgiveness of those whose sins have banished them from His presence. David had often experienced God's unmerited forgiveness; should he not now extend that same gift to his estranged son?

The woman of Tekoa was trying to heal a broken family. But her words are a beautiful—and remarkably prescient—description of the grace of God in saving mankind, rivaling anything that can be found on the subject in the New Testament.

Every life, every relationship, will eventually reach a point of no return beyond which there will be no opportunity for correction. That end-point is *death*. When the moment of death has come, our life is "like water spilled on the ground," forever and irretrievably gone. Whatever regrets we might have harbored in life will go with us to the grave unresolved. Unfulfilled intentions will remain unfulfilled for eternity. Death is the ultimate finality, a bridge that, once crossed, can never be crossed again. And whatever baggage we carry across that bridge, we're stuck with at the final judgment.

That's what makes sin such a monster. It burdens us with a load of guilt that makes us terrified of death. Our knowledge of all the foolish decisions we've made, the careless words spoken, the people we've hurt, the squandered opportunities—all this baggage renders us unprepared for the moment when we must give account for the life we've lived. Like Adam and Eve, our sins have banished us from the presence of God, and our doom is fixed.

Except that God has "devised means" by which that awful and unavoidable fate can be avoided. He has sacrificed His own Son as a ransom for our sins, paying a debt we could not pay ourselves. And in the resurrection of Jesus, we are given hope that we, too, shall conquer death some day. Our sins may banish us from God's presence for a while, but they can be forgiven; death is final, but we do not have to carry our regrets with us when we make that crossing. God has given hope to His banished ones, that they will not be expelled at the judgment.

David took the wise woman's advice, and brought Absalom back from exile. But the rest of this story provides us with a final word of caution: Absalom spurned David's kindness, and died in rebellion against his father. God's means for saving us will likewise come to naught, if we do not accept His gift with a heart of gratitude and service. God does not expect us to be perfect, but He does expect us to demonstrate in our lives that His forgiveness means something to us.

– David King