

**Reading:** Deuteronomy 33:26-29

**Theme:** A Divine Hug.

Since the middle of March 2020 many have found the time to be hard and difficult and even more so with heightened lockdown restrictions again in some areas. Over the 9 months or so, people have felt more and more isolated, scared, weary, fearful, lonely, depressed, low, suspicious or resentful of others - even paranoid. Even if we are Christians, we are not immune from such feelings; tensions, strained relationships can rise within families, also in in the church family. There is a lot of advice about people expressing their feelings and not bottling things up. In such instances we are to be wise if we feel the need to, because sometimes the ones we open up to may be carrying burdens unknown to us, or we may open up old wounds...

We may be tired of lockdowns, restrictions, dangers of Covid etc. - I think we all are. Yet there is a difference between being weary and being tired. Weariness is being tired in a situation, trying to go on and things being more difficult and we feel we have done nothing worthwhile and feel we have to do it all again; while tiredness is about work and satisfaction e.g. we may take a day off to decorate a room or sort the garden out – it is hard work, we are tired, but have a sense of satisfaction at the job done or hopefully well done!

In the Queen's Christmas speech, she acknowledged that many just want to hug their loved ones and friends; many have said on TV they just want to hug family members and even in the life of the church here, people have said they just wanted a hug or as we would say Wales, have a cwch.

In the verses we read, Moses was coming to the end of his last ever recorded words in Deuteronomy 33. In v1 we learn these are his **personal blessings** pronounced on God's people. In v2-5 he recalls the **principal blessings** the people of God had already received - all to do with their trusting, keeping and obeying the words God gave. In v6-25 there are **particular blessings** suited to each of the tribes of Israel. In v26-29 **parting blessings** are pronounced collectively for Israel, using the name "Jeshurun" = 'the upright one'. This is Moses' final reminder to God's people that His blessings can only be fully realised as they walk uprightly with their God in obedience to His holy word. Keep that in mind for our own lives and for the life of the church here.

As we move forward into the year ahead there may be many things that could be troubling us, that will dismay, hurt and confuse us and we want to get out of such troublesome trials in situations. We may feel like giving up, running away, raging at God or those around us and questioning "Why?" In it all we would want comfort and encouragement, for someone to talk to, to take hold of us and give us a big hug. We are to remember and to realise that no matter how low we go, or even feel we have sunk in despair or helplessness, that our God is there with us and around us - v27a declares that to us as God's people. Let's very briefly note 4 things from the 4 verses we read earlier:

### **1. Problems will not crush us.**

In v28 Moses declares the people of God dwell in safety and the reason is that this security comes from, springs from the

secure, fresh, flowing source that is presented as everlasting. It is from the place of abundance and is day by day renewed with freshness as the dew. Not only so, but that which would be against them, would be driven out before them (v27b).

If we are God's child through the Lord Jesus, then we are part of His people and are under a greater NT covenant than those under the OT covenant. We have more light; for us there's the sacrifice made once and for all for our sin - as we have trusted the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, we are safe and secure for all time and eternity. Yet we are still people, saved sinners, still affected by the world around us, our own fallen nature and sometimes we struggle from our nature and nurture - that nature is a fallen nature that still affects and hinders, but is not to dominate our Christian life and walk.

Often, we can look inward and be absorbed with our own failures and weaknesses. We may even question if God has saved us and made us His child as we feel so helpless and hopeless with the pressures and the problems on us. Yet God has promised to be with us in every situation we go into and through. We are to remember we can dwell in safety and our problems will not crush us and certainly not cause us to be lost eternally. Now see:

## **2. No one is like our God.**

This is what we are told in v26. Throughout the chapter, as blessings are pronounced, Moses reminds the people of Israel about their God and all the things He's done and will do for them - He is the covenant God, the Law giving God, the God of all blessings. As Moses goes on to describe the blessings

on the various tribes, Moses owns there is no one like their God. At times God may seem far away from us, but He rides on the heavens to help His people and on the clouds in His majesty – He is never far from His people.

Our God has not changed. Our problems, fears and difficulties do not prevent Him coming to help us. Our guilt and deserving His condemnation did not stop Him coming as our Saviour in Jesus. He is still our helper in times of need and trouble. As we saw in this morning's message - nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord - which includes with it all the help and strength we need in each and every situation. If we take time out to consider our heavenly Father, our Saviour Jesus, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, we will be amazed, thrilled and even overwhelmed by the consideration as to who the triune God is to us, what He has done for us, is doing in us and for us, and what He will do for us. We'll have to come to the conclusion that there is no one like our God. We are to constantly and ongoingly have big thoughts of our God and Saviour who rides on the heavens, on the clouds in His majesty and He has saved even us in the Lord Jesus. Our God may be high and exalted, but we also see He is:

### **3. Our dwelling place.**

We see this in v27a – the eternal God is our refuge, or dwelling, habitation, mansion house (*so the word has been translated*)! Here's the place where we are safe, relaxed, at rest. Every believer is safe, secure and at home with God in through the Lord Jesus. When we are in the Lord Jesus, there is a sense in which we are “*at home*”. Just as Moses and the

Israelites had God as their habitation, even as they wandered in the wilderness - *“Lord, you have been our dwelling-place throughout all generations.”* (Psalm 90v1) In the same way, we are to remember we are at home and yet heading homeward to our God and Saviour in heaven; we are accepted and will arrive safely there. In God’s plans and purposes, we have every blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus **now**. All God’s love, grace, power, mercy, protection, guidance and keeping are ours (*and much, much more beside!*)

There may be many changes in our lives - where we live, work, study etc. as we go through life, but our eternal refuge, habitation and mansion house is prepared, fixed and secure for all eternity. Though that is true and guaranteed for us, yet we still know travelling trials and difficulties, may even feel at times we will fail to get to the promised land of heaven. It was great that the people of Israel had Moses to lead them, but even he was shortly going to die and they would feel on their own. Yet above and beyond Moses there was Someone greater who would be there for them - their great God and no one was like Him! For us, their God is our God; He is with us, no matter what we go through, for He is with us in the persons of Jesus and also the Holy Spirit.

Whatever we go through, no matter how low we feel or sink to, even if we feel we have hit rock bottom, then we are not only able to expectantly look up to our God, but also look expectantly down to see, remember and note that underneath us are the everlasting arms. They are not there to squash us, but to support us; not to drag us lower, but to lift us up and when are lifted up, it is not to crush us, but to caress us and

give us the most loving, tender and reassuring hug – a divine hug, cuddle and cwtch.

Those of us who are blessed with children or grandchildren etc. and they may have fallen over and are hurt, or maybe a dog or some animal is near them and seems aggressive, so we go and pick them up, wrap our arms around them and give them a cuddle, a hug to sooth their fears, stop their tears and encourage them to go on. I feel that's part of the picture here as the Lord takes us up in His almighty arms, lavishly calms, soothes our fears, reassures us of His infinite love and helps us go on in our Christian lives - even though all around and within us are troubles, fears and distractions. As we consider who this God is to us - there is no one like Him, it drives home, reinforces we are:

#### **4. A blessed people.**

Here in v29 we are reminded we, as Christians, are a people saved by the Lord - we did not earn it, certainly did not deserve it and contributed nothing to it, but we are saved, rescued, transformed through His sovereign grace, love and mercy. If that was not enough, He is our shield, our helper and our sword. The picture here is that we have a Sovereign Protector, unseen, yet forever at hand which is to encourage us when we are in dark and difficult situations in which we are afraid, blindsided, panicking, weary, helpless. We are to remember we are under Divine protection, in the protective custody of the God of all Creation.

Matthew Henry wrote *“Never were people so well helped. If they were in any strait, God himself rode upon the heavens*

*for their help, De 33:26. And they were a people saved by the Lord, De 33:29. If they were in danger of any harm, or in want of any good, they had an eternal God to go to, an almighty power to trust to; nothing could hurt those whom God helped, nor was it possible that the people should perish which was saved by the Lord. Those that are added to the gospel Israel are such as shall be saved,"*

Added to those matters, we are well equipped and armed for all the battles and situations we face as we go onward in the Christian life. We are to always remember we are in enemy territory and in a battle until, at the moment of our death, we put on our demob suit of glorious robes. What provision is made for us – the Lord is our shield and helper! How many times does the word of God describe the Lord in terms of our defence, our shield, our buckler, our rock, our fortress, our defender? It is many, many times and God's word uses different pictures to drive home to us our safety and security. In NT we are told we have to take up and use the shield of faith – the activity of saving faith recalled and applied to our lives by ourselves, by the Spirit – as we apply what is true of us in our hurting, distressing and confusing times, especially as the battle is fierce and could overrun us. It is remembering we have the Lord as our helper – Hebrews 13v6 *'So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"'*

We have a sword to use to defend us and do so as we go onward in the battle – even against unnumbered foes. It is the sword of the Spirit – the word of God - which we can use to defend ourselves and battle against temptations and use to

destroy the arguments of the world, sin and the devil. We fail to remember the calibre of our Excalibur – but our sword is real and not a myth - *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12) Sometimes it operates in our own lives - exposes our coldness, wandering away from our Saviour, it shows us our sin and laser scalpel-like removes it from us, brings us to repentance and reconciliation to our God and Saviour (1 John 1:9).

Remember that as we are on the victory side, we are to fight, battle on as true men and women of God as we live daily for Him. Yes, we can get weary in well doing, we will hurt, struggle, feel like giving in and up, but do not do so! He who is with us is greater than those who are against us. Our God and Saviour is close at hand and should we stumble, even fall, we find beneath us are the everlasting arms - that are there not to chastise us, punish us, but to encourage us, to lift us up, to hug us and sooth our pains, hurt, feelings of being abandoned, isolated – for in Jesus He is our Father who loves us so much He gave His only begotten Son so we could be safe and secure for both time and eternity. As we go into this New Year let us lean on Him and His almighty arms and keep close to His loving heart.