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SELF-INFLICTED DEFEAT!

Today's text: 2 Kings Chaps. 24-25

Extracts:

- 1. “In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years; then he turned and rebelled against him. And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by His servants the prophets” [2 Kgs 24: 1-2]**
- 2. “And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah... that Evilmerodach king of Babylon in the year that he began to reign did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison; and he spake kindly to him and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon... And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life” [2 Kgs 25: 27, 28, 30]**

There is the story of a servant who was a very clever thief. In those days, the technology of fingerprinting or DNA had not been developed. So, the master found it difficult to know which of his numerous servants was stealing his treasures. One day, the master devised a technique. He gave each of his servants a foot-long stick and told the thief among them to confess or his stick would be longer by one inch by the following morning. The clever thief devised his own response. He cut his own stick by one inch, expecting it to grow back by the next morning. The next day, the other servants' sticks remained one foot long while that of the thief was one inch shorter!

What a self-inflicted defeat! In many respects, we are not any different. We think we are clever. We think that we are smart. We do dirty things, break God's laws or disregard prophetic warnings. When the repercussions hit us back, we blame our enemies or detractors! We forget God's word that “there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” [Prov. 14: 12]. Most defeats that we face, our inability to reach our full potentials or reap the promises that God has for us, are self-inflicted. In other words, they can be avoided. For example, we all know that we will die a physical death one day. That is why most people take out a life insurance policy. Yet, no policyholder wants to commit suicide because no insurance company will pay death benefits to the survivors of a suicide! So, why do we expect God to grant us victory when we inflict fatal injuries on our blessing covenant with Him?

In today's lesson, we shall use the story of the last kings of Judah before the captivity and exile in Babylon to study the subject. The lessons from there should assist us to avoid plunging ourselves into avoidable defeats.

1. What is self-inflicted defeat?

During the final stage of the African Zone of the FIFA World Cup staged in 1978 in Argentina, there were three teams left: Egypt, Nigeria and Tunisia. Only one team was going to represent Africa and the winner would be determined on league basis. Nigeria had beaten Egypt, 4-0, and drawn away, 0-0, with Tunisia. If it could beat Tunisia in the return match in Lagos, Nigeria would have the opportunity to represent Africa for the first time. The match was scheduled for Saturday, 12 November 1977.

Expectations were high. Victory was not in doubt. Some rich football fanatics were already making plans to go to Argentina for the soccer tournament. Then came the match. Tunisia took a free kick from the mid-field. It was a high lob into the Nigerian goal area. Godwin Odiye, the most reliable defence man on the Nigerian team, headed the ball back to his goalkeeper, tall Emmanuel Okala. The ball flew over his hands into an empty net! That was the only goal of the match and Nigeria missed the 1978 World Cup tournament! The next day, a Lagos newspaper screamed “Odiye defeats Nigeria!”

Nigeria’s defeat was self-inflicted because a Nigerian, not a Tunisian, scored the goal. The Nigerian player did what he thought was right. That might not have been the first time, but in the past, the goalkeeper might have picked up the ball. In like manner, there are many things that we do which we may consider right in our own eyes. In the end, they may explain our failures or defeat. Let us consider a few examples:

- A clever student refuses to study, believing that his brilliance will see him/her through. In the end s(he) may fail the examination.
- A well-paid employee does not plan how to spend or invest his/her earnings. Should s(he) lose the job unexpectedly, hardship may begin right away.
- A handsome young man enjoys fornication with as many girls as he can sleep with. One day, he may be diagnosed for HIV/AIDS.
- A former President of the most powerful nation in the world was having an affair with an intern. When the matter finally came to public attention, he was publicly disgraced with impeachment (i.e., arraignment for trial by the Senate). In spite of his solid economic record, he is more remembered today for the scandal.
- A celibate priest has just been humiliated and deported from one of the Caribbean islands when it was discovered that he had been squatting and sexually abusing a 15-year old girl in his home guarded by two shepherd dogs.

In all those cases, defeat could have been avoided if the persons themselves had done what was right rather than what they considered right in their own eyes.

With respect to God's promises to us, the standards have not been lowered. *God will grant us what He has promised. However, if we ourselves then take steps that will take us away from His blessings, we are only courting defeat.* Let us examine today's text for a clearer understanding of the subject.

2. Judah's well-paved road to captivity!

Let us go back in time. Following the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden, God promised the coming of the Messiah when He told Satan (who had deceived Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent), "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it [He] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" [Gen. 3: 15; Rom. 16: 20; Gal. 4: 4]. This promise was advanced through Noah after the wicked inhabitants of the earth had been destroyed by flood. Through one of his sons descended Abraham [Gen. 11: 26] whom God promised, "In thee shall *all families of the earth be blessed*" [Gen. 12: 3]. Then, we know of Abraham's child of promise, Isaac, and Isaac's twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob received the covenant blessings and bore twelve sons [Gen. 36: 22-26]. When Jacob, now Israel, the new name given him by God [Gen. 32: 28], was about to die, he called his children and told each of them what would befall them in the future. To Judah, his 4th son (by age), he said, among others, "Judah is a lion's whelp...*the scepter shall not depart from Judah*" [Gen. 49: 9,10]. David came from this tribe. So did Jesus who is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" [Rev. 5: 5].

When David came to the throne as king of Israel, he wanted to build God's temple. However, through a prophet called Nathan, God told him not to do so, that his successor, Solomon, would build it. In that same prophecy, God promised David, "Thine house and thy kingdom shall *be established for ever* before thee; *thy throne shall be established for ever*" [2 Sam. 7: 1-16]. When angel Gabriel came to announce the conception of Jesus to Mary, he told her, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God *shall give unto Him the throne of His father David.* And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; *and of His kingdom there shall be no end*" [Lk 1: 30-33]. So, God's plan was to lay the foundation for the earthly appearance of the Messiah promised in the Garden of Eden!

What followed after David can be regarded as a series of self-inflicted defeats, as if to thwart God's plan. Here is the chronology in brief:

- a) The kingdom of Israel was divided into two after the death of Solomon. The larger northern kingdom retained the name, Israel, with its capital in Samaria, while the small southern kingdom, Judah, retained Jerusalem as its capital.
- b) Of all the kings that ruled in Israel, hardly a single one of them did what was right in the sight of God. *Idolatry* and *immorality* became their national values. Yet, they had among them powerful prophets like Elijah,

Elisha, Amos and Hosea to whom they paid no heed. As a result, the northern kingdom of Israel went into captivity in Assyria [**2 Kgs 17: 1-41**].

- c) The southern kingdom had some God-fearing kings, such as Jehosaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah. Nevertheless, the road to defeat and captivity was getting smoother with each new king. By the death of Josiah, the good ones were gone. Every king thereafter did what was evil in the sight of God. Again, they did not lack prophets to warn them: Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk.

The particular cases of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah

Jehoiakim was Josiah's son. Rather than continue with the spiritual reforms for which his father was well known, he backslid. He shed innocent blood and filled Jerusalem with it "which the Lord would not pardon" [**2 Kgs 24: 4**]. Moreover, he rebelled against the king of Babylon soon after he had rescued him from the clutches of the king of Egypt. Those acts were certainly self-inflicted injuries! In return, God removed His protection over Judah and all its enemies poured in from every angle: Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon, and armies from the Chaldees, Syrians, Moabites and Ammon [**v. 1-2**]. So, as prophesied by Ezekiel [**Ezek. 19: 8**], these enemy forces destroyed Judah and took the people as captives [**2 Kgs 24: 2**].

Jehoiachin succeeded his father at the age of 18 but he was not any better. He continued with evil. Nebuchadnezzar came back in the eighth year of Jehoiachin's reign and raided the temple and took everything away to Babylon. Jehoiachin and his family, seven thousand men of might, a thousand smiths and craftsmen, and all the able-bodied men were carried into exile in Babylon. The king of Babylon put Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, to take over as king of Judah. All that he changed was his own name to Zedekiah but he kept the culture of evil and disobedience of the word of God [**2 Kgs 24: 17-19**]. Nebuchadnezzar simply returned, killed all of Zedekiah's sons, plucked out the king's eyes and carried all of them bound into captivity in Babylon. Jerusalem was set on fire and the walls of the great city were broken down [**2 Kgs 25: 7-10**]. That set back God's redemption plan for several centuries.

3. Lessons

You can imagine what the kings and people of Judah suffered during that period: physical and emotional strains, shame and humiliation, disgrace and defeat, all because they were spiritually separated from God. It is even worse to know that the separation was self-inflicted!

Right now, you may have all the material gadgets and yet you have no comfort. You still need tranquilizers to find sleep. You have position but no power or influence. You have a big church building but no worshippers. You are parading the best qualifications from the best schools and yet they are not working for your

business or your job search. You have a fat salary that you are spending only on yourself and yet you still have to borrow to feed before the next pay cheque [check]. You have been praying for reconciliation with your separated or divorced spouse and several years later, nothing is happening.

Of course, you may be passing through trials so that you can be toughened by the experience. However, a majority of the problems are as a result of your own actions. For example, you cannot be asking God to reconcile you with your spouse when you are practising adultery with somebody else. Your business cannot take off when you are cutting corners. You cannot enjoy your material wealth when you are self-centred and living freely. Such are self-inflicted injuries that can result in defeat where you ought to have victory or success.

So, what lessons can we learn from the story of the children of Israel? Here are a few of them:

a) *God's promises are tied to obedience*

I cannot find any verse in the bible where God blessed people for disobeying Him. Like mount Zion, God's promises of blessing abide forever. However *continued* obedience is the key to *continued* blessing [Ezek. 3:20]. We must never forget that.

b) *Truth tellers are not your enemies!*

When people take to the wayward road of rebellion against God, they resent the advice or warning of those who are telling them the truth. Instead, they would prefer to hang out with deceivers and liars. Those who walk by the counsel of the ungodly or stand by the rules of sinners or sit on the platform of the scornful "are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" [Ps. 1: 1, 4]. The kings and people of Israel and Judah ignored the warnings of the prophets and were driven like chaff into exile and captivity in Babylon.

c) *Stop digging!*

The law of holes states that if you find yourself in a hole, stop digging! The danger of continuing in disobedience is that we can move from bad to worse at every step forward. David began with adultery and soon added murder. Therefore, we need to stop complicating our lives, just stop making our situation worse. Like the Prodigal Son, we need to turn a new leaf and let God's mercy return to us. When Jehoaichin returned to God, having been harnessed by 37 years of captivity in Babylon, God showed mercy to him and he found favour with the king of Babylon. He was released and promoted and put on a fat pension for the rest of his life [2

Kgs 25: 27-30]. The remnant of the people who trusted in God did return from exile in due course and God's promises for Israel have and are still being fulfilled as a result. Ours will not be different once we return to our God.

4. Conclusion

Are you so helpless about sin? Yes, if you are not regenerated, if you are still living in the flesh, giving way to your own desires. The *Contemporary English Version* of the Bible translates **Galatians 5: 16-21** as follows:

If the Spirit guides you, you won't obey your selfish desires. The Spirit and your desires are enemies of each other. They are always fighting each other and keeping you from doing what you feel you should. But if you obey the Spirit, the Law of Moses has no control over you. People's desires make them give in to immoral ways, filthy thoughts and shameful deeds. They worship idols, practise witchcraft, hate others, and are hard to get along with. People become jealous, angry, and selfish. They not only argue and cause trouble, but they are envious. They get drunk, carry on at wild parties, and do other evil things as well. I told you before, and I am telling you again: No one who does these things will share in the blessings of God's kingdom.

Most, if not all those sins are self-inflicted and their end is loss of God's blessings. However, you can take the high road of *continuous* obedience, which only the Holy Spirit can sustain, for "no man can say that Jesus Christ is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" [**1 Cor. 12: 3**]. Jesus has told us that only those who do His Father's will are His brothers and sisters [**Mk 3: 35**].

In times past, God spoke to us by His prophets. Now, He speaks to us through His Son "whom He hath appointed heir of all things" [**Heb. 1: 1**]. If Jesus is the vine and believers are the branches, why don't you abide in Him so that He can abide in you for, without Him, *you can do nothing* [**Jn 14: 5**]!

Stop digging because only you can stop it! Self-inflicted injuries are dangerous to your blessings. Choose victory, not defeat!