

THE WICKED LABOURS FOR THE RIGHTEOUS!

Today's Text: Eccl. 2; Prov. 13: 22

Extracts:

God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God [Eccl. 2: 26].

Compare with: A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous [Prov. 13: 22].

General Sani Abacha was the military President of Nigeria, 1993-98. A ruthless dictator who was impervious to both internal and international condemnation of his human rights record, he enforced his rule through press censorship and the arrest, imprisonment and execution of his opponents. One of such critics was Segun Obasanjo, a former military head of state (1976-79) that Abacha arrested and detained on cooked up charges of planning a coup. Abacha planned a return to civilian rule by October 1998. However, his plan was to actually succeed himself! He allowed the formation of five political parties, all of which nominated him as their Presidential candidate! In June 1998, two months to the said election, Abacha went to bed one Sunday evening and did not wake up on Monday morning. He had died in his sleep! In May 1999, Obasanjo, the famous prisoner of the maximum dictator was sworn in as the first democratically elected Christian President of Nigeria!

While in office, Abacha had stolen over three billion United States dollars that he had stowed away in Europe and other parts of the world. Today, the Nigerian government has recovered close to one billion dollars that it hopes to use to develop programmes for the poor and the needy. In deed, the wicked labours for the righteous.

In your place of work, business, worship or study, you may have come across similar stories. Bosses are deliberately sitting on the promotion of some subordinates that they do not like only for them to be removed and replaced with such people! Why do some people invest so much in destroying others? How can we inherit the wealth and achievements of those who are looking for our heads or destruction? These are some of the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

1. Who is a wicked person?

A class of 8-year old pupils was once asked to describe a wicked person. Most of them identified their parents as wicked. One of them was asked to explain and she said, “I am not allowed to do whatever I like! Isn’t that wicked?”

Actually, some of us tend to equate wickedness with harsh treatment of others and such like conduct. However, the stock-in-trade of the most wicked creature ever made by God, the devil, is to kill, steal and destroy [**Jn 10: 10**]. In doing so, he does not come ugly or harsh or roaring like a lion, but may actually pose as an angel of light [**2 Cor. 11: 14**]. For example, in describing those who profess Him falsely, Jesus told His disciples, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who *practise lawlessness!*’ [**Matt. 7: 22-23**]. The Old King James Bible translates it as “ye that work iniquity.” Therefore, the wicked person and the *unrepentant sinner* are one and the same.

Here are some characteristics of a wicked person:

- ❑ *S(he) desires evil*
The word of God says “The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbour finds no favour in his eyes” [**Prov. 21: 10**]. For the wicked person, evil is something s(he) loves to pour out [**Prov.15: 28**]! In fact, hurting others is the sport s(he) loves the best. Therefore, you can never please the wicked because you do not know what s(he) wants.
- ❑ *S(he) is far from God*
A wicked person cannot be repentant. Consequently, his/her sacrifice (such as tithes or charity on stolen wealth, public show of reverence, etc) is an abomination to God [**Prov. 15: 8**]. Therefore, God is far from the wicked [**v.29**].
- ❑ *S(he) is vengeful*
The wicked has an unforgiving spirit. The book that will make the top of his/her reading list each day is called “Beyond Pardon!” If you have not offended them, they will make up something that will form the basis of their endless attacks on you. For example, when you succeed at something, that will invite their envy that is a good basis for attacking you! When for one reason or the other you have not contributed to the baking of a pie, then you must not share out of it.

A good example can be found among the men who accompanied David to recover the wives, children and goods stolen from their camp in Ziklag by

the Amalekites. Two hundred of the men were too weak and tired to pursue; so, David left them by the brook and went on with the remaining four hundred men. This group won a major victory and recovered all that they had lost. As they were coming back, they refused to share with the two hundred left behind, for “because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil.” Of course, David countered that position and shared the spoil equally with both groups. For that vengeful attitude, the word of God called them “wicked and worthless men” [1 Sam. 30: 16-24].

We see from the forgoing that the wicked is *anybody who walks according to the flesh and practises the works of the flesh* [Gal. 5: 19-21]. The righteous, on the other hand, is *anybody who walks and lives in the Spirit* [vv. 22, 23, 25]. The word of God says, “The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous and the unfaithful for the upright” [Prov. 21: 18]. A verse from the chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes that we are looking at today says that God makes the sinner to gather for the righteous to inherit [Eccl. 2: 26]. Let us develop this spiritual principle further.

2. The wicked pursues blindly!

When the wicked strives for power or material wealth or any other advantage over others, what drives him/her? Why does s(he) have to trample on you to achieve his/her objectives? Perhaps a simple way to attempt to answer those questions is to see the wicked in action! For example:

a) *The wicked may know something about your future*

S(he) may have heard while discussing management succession during the last Board Meeting that you are a strong candidate to succeed the outgoing CEO (Chief Executive Officer). S(he) must stop it because s(he) has other (inside or outside) candidates in mind, even when you are obviously the best candidate. Or, your work contract is due for renewal in a few weeks' time but s(he) wants it to lapse and replace you with somebody else that s(he) can manipulate. There are so many other reasons why you could be the target for attack.

It could be out of mere *mischief*. For example, Stephen was one of the seven deacons appointed by the Apostles to take charge of administering the growing early church. He was “full of faith and power” and “did great wonders and signs among the people.” Some men who came from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Libertines) who were disputing with Stephen could not match his wisdom and spiritual gifts. Did they admire him and listen to him? No! Instead, “they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God’” That was how they raised false witnesses against him [Acts 6: 1- 12].

It could be out of *God's promise to the righteous person*. For example, God had revealed in dreams that Joseph was going to lord it over his older brothers. For that they envied him and determined to kill him and “we shall see what will become of his dreams!” [**Gen. 37: 1-20**]. In another example, King Saul was determined to kill David just because the prophet Samuel had revealed to him that God had chosen David to replace Saul as the king of Israel [**1 Sam. 15: 28; 1 Sam. 20: 30-31**].

Painfully, it could just be out of *sheer ignorance*. The Islamic fundamentalists who participate in suicide bombing attacks or *jihad* are convinced that they are fighting for God. The priests, scribes and Pharisees who gave Jesus a running battle throughout His earthly ministry were very convinced that they were fighting God's cause, as typified by the Law of Moses. Therefore, you may be a target of the attacks of the wicked in the name of upholding family or cultural values or church (not necessarily Biblical) doctrine! That may be one of the reasons that Jesus said of those who had crucified Him, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” [**Lk 23: 34**].

b) *The wicked can fight dirty!*

The word of God says, “A wicked man hardens his face” [**Prov. 21: 29**]. That picture suggests the battle posture of the wicked. S(he) does not believe in rules unless they favour him/her. Anything goes and morality or integrity has nothing to do with it. S(he) will lie, cheat, steal, kill or do anything that will lead to achieving his/her purpose. For example, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, stained his coat of many colours with the blood of a kid goat, took it to their father and had the audacity to tell the old man, “We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?” As the old man mourned the loss of his favourite son, “all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him” [**Gen. 37: 31-35**]. What a wicked lot!

Take the case of Haman, a top adviser to the Persian king who was the husband of Queen Esther, a Jew. Just because of his hatred for Esther's uncle, Mordecai, Haman manipulated the king to sign an irrevocable decree that could lead to the destruction of all the Jews in the vast kingdom [**Esth. 3: 1-15**]. Even though Haman was highly favoured and was promoted next in rank to the king, he still said, “Yet all this avails me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate” [**Esth. 5: 13**]. What a dirty and greedy fighter!

3. The wicked is merely labouring for the righteous!

The good news is that the righteous will inherit the labour of the wicked. That is what the word of God has assured those who are God-led. This reward is manifested in the following ways:

a) *The wicked may be instruments for fulfilling God's purpose*

Most times, when we are being pushed and pressed forward by wicked people, they may actually be propelling us in the direction of our destinies. How could Joseph have become the governor of Egypt and save his people during the famine if his brothers had not sold him into slavery in Egypt? How could he have met the domestic staff of Pharaoh if he had not be put in prison as a result of the false allegation by his master's wife? Joseph recognized this much when he told his brothers after their father's death, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, *you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive*" [Gen. 50: 19].

b) *The wicked may be strengthening your spiritual muscles!*

One Nigerian proverb says, "I thank God for my enemies because they have pointed out my weaknesses." When Jeremiah complained to God about the prosperity of the wicked and questioned why the righteous have not been so "blessed," God replied, "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?" [Jer. 12: 1-5]. The muscle tone that you need to run against horses is certainly superior to the one for walking with the footmen. Therefore, God will allow the wicked to raise the bar of our hardship or distress, to wake us up from spiritual complacency, or to prepare us for the higher calling from the Lord.

David spent the better part of thirteen years or so in the wilderness, running away from king Saul who wanted to kill him. The moon and stars were his lamps. The owls and hunting animals served as his alarm clocks. His swimming pools were brooks that also supplied drinking water. To provide for his troops and family members, he had to depend on charity from selfish people like Abigail's husband, Nabal, whose flock he took care of free of charge. Yet, it was during that time that David wrote most of the Psalms associated with him. Though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he did not fear any evil. God prepared a table for him in the presence of his enemies, anointed his head with oil and his cup ran over [Ps. 23: 4,5]. Many were his afflictions but the Lord delivered him out of them all [Ps. 34: 19].

When you talk of hardship, ask Paul! The wicked enemies put him in prison so many times. He received 39 stripes five times, beaten with rod or stoned, and much more [2 Cor. 11: 22-27]. What did all that do to his

spiritual muscle? He became stronger! He was pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed [2 Cor. 4: 8-10]. He wrote most of the books in the New Testament and contributed significantly to spreading the Gospel beyond the Jewish enclave.

c) *The righteous inherits the estate of the wicked!*

The bottom line is that the righteous inherits the estate of the wicked, as we saw in the case of Abacha and Obasanjo. Abacha had built his dream of Nigeria for himself but it went to the person that he had excluded through false imprisonment. That is why the word of God says, “God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is *good in His sight*; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is *good before God*” [Eccl. 2: 26].

A good example can be found in the book of Esther that we had earlier referred to. Following the failure of Haman’s conspiracy against Mordecai and the Jews, Haman was hanged in the gallows that he had built for Mordecai [Esth. 7: 9-10]. After Esther had disclosed to her husband her relationship with Mordecai, “the king took off his signet ring which he had taken from Haman and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman” [Esth. 8: 1-2]. Finally, Mordecai became second in command to the king “and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, *seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen*” [Esth. 10: 3].

4. Conclusion

An important lesson from today’s study is that you must be careful how you pursue your enemies or life goals and objectives, contend with your rivals for attention or promotion, or treat your subordinates, whether in the church or in the secular world. You need to pay attention to how you gather material wealth or go on vengeance trips. The outcome is not good news because you cannot curse whom God has blessed. Why should you lose your earthly blessings and ultimate salvation just because you are working to destroy others?

Think about it.