

“Is This How You Repay the Lord?”

Intro: In our Wednesday night class we've been studying together the book of Exodus. The history of the Israelites can teach us a lot about our relationship with God. Even the apostle Paul must have taught many lessons from this part of the Bible, for he says,

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Referring to the many failures of the Israelites in the wilderness, he said,
Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

I have been amazed that, at the end of Moses' life, he solemnly warned Israel of their tendency toward apostasy and even gave them a song that anticipated their ultimate apostasy. That song would remind them of their unfaithfulness in contrast to the faithfulness of God. It is found in Deut. 32.

Of God He says,

“He is ...a faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he” (32:5).

But of Israel the song says,

“They have acted corruptly toward him; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation” (32:5).

And then this phrase particularly caught my attention:

Is this the way you repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you? (Deut. 32:6)

Today we can still see this contrast between God's faithfulness and man's unfaithfulness.

God has given us life and expects us to acknowledge Him as our Creator.

Isn't it obvious that if we are God's creation then we owe it to Him to honor Him as the creator and live in keeping with His purposes and by His laws?

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Rom. 1:21-22).

Isn't it clear from Paul's statement that God's expects His creatures to glorify Him? To thank Him? And to obey Him?

But often people ignore Him and live as they please. They imagine that they know more than God and do what pleases them rather than what pleases the Lord!

If Moses, were living among us, he might ask the people of our time, “Is this how you repay the Lord?”

God has given us our material possessions and expects us to use them to His glory.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

But often people receive from him and use their possessions selfishly and even to finance what God would not approve. Like ancient Israel they forget the God who gave them all that they have:

“Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior” (Deut. 32:15)

Is this how you repay the Lord?

God has given His Son to redeem us from our sin and he expects us to love Him and to gather together to remember Him each week by observing the Lord's Supper.

The night Jesus died he took bread and fruit of the vine and instituted a supper for his disciples to keep in memory what He would for them and us.

“This do in remembrance of me”.

And we can see that the early church honored this word of the Lord by meeting every Sunday to break bread.

And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

But many today treat Sunday just like any other day. They covet the time for themselves. It is my only day off. I’ve got chores to do. I want to get away to the lake or the golf course or to visit someone. And the Lord’s sacrifice is forgotten. It was a first century problem as well:

...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

If Moses were here he just might ask the 93% of Americans who stay home from church every Sunday, “Is this how you repay the Lord?”

God has forgiven us our transgressions and expects us to extend to others the same forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the heart of our covenant with God. We are a forgiven people.

“For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” (Hebrews 8:12)

But now God expect us to be forgiving toward others.

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

But many hold grudges and talk angrily about others rather than forgive them and seek to be reconciled to them.

But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. (Galatians 5:15)

If Moses were here he might ask, "Is this how you repay the Lord?"

God has taught us the truth and expects us to teach it to others?

Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. (Ephesians 4:21; NIV)

And now he wants us to teach others this same good news of salvation and hope.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19)

But many never find time to tell others about what the Lord has done for them. Even some disciples of the first century were that way:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (Hebrews 5:12)

If Moses were here he might ask, "Is this how you repay the Lord?"

In all these ways, we can see how God has been so good and faithful to us in providing our greatest needs. With those blessings are expectations and responsibilities that not all have faithfully repaid.

There have always been those who wanted to repay the Lord.

There was one Israelite who had learned the important lesson of the song of Moses. His song memorializes a different spirit.

What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I shall lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I shall pay my vows to the Lord. Oh may it be in the presence of all His people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones. O Lord, surely I am Thy servant, I am Thy servant, the son of Thy handmaid, Thou hast loosed my bonds. To Thee I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the Lord. I shall pay my vows to the Lord. Oh may it be in the presence of all His people, In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 116:12-19)

That man reveals that he got it! He wanted to come together with God's people and worship Him.

And there are many today who I believe live in the spirit of this psalmist. Not only do you know the faithfulness of God; you also try to be faithful to him.

I see it in your attempts to give your life to the God who gave you life.

I see it in your attempts to honor God by giving to others a portion of what He has given you.

I see it in your attempts to be present when we gather to worship God and honor His son who died for us.

I see it in your attempts to be loving and forgiving when others have wronged you.

I see it in your attempts to share the gospel with others.

I am sure that none of us will ever be able to satisfy the debt we owe God for all that He has done for us. That's why we speak about grace as unmerited favor. We could not in a thousand lifetimes repay all that God has done for us.

*“So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”
(Luke 17:10)*

And God doesn't expect us to repay all that He has done for us. He only wants us to be faithful to him in the one lifetime He has given us!

Conclusion: So let me ask you to think about this idea. How are you repaying the Lord for all that He has done for you?

Oh, there is one more repayment.

‘Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, as I live forever, If I sharpen My flashing sword and My hand takes hold on justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, and I will repay those who hate Me. (Deuteronomy 32:40-41)