

It's a Bit Predictable
Deuteronomy 31:14-23

Brothers and sisters, who is the predictable person in your life? And I don't mean predictable in the reliable, dependable, always there for you, kind of way – I mean predictable in the *"oh brother, we know how this is going to turn out"* kind of way...

Maybe it's a sibling who is always finding "terrific business opportunities" to invest in, and comes to tell you all about it and wants you to go in on it with him but you've seen this all before and you know how its going to turn out. Eight months from now he's going to be giving you excuses about market conditions, gov't regulations, or skittish investors that have sunk this opportunity. It's pretty predictable...

Or maybe its that friend who is always looking for love in all the wrong places and they are telling you about their new boyfriend, and that this time they have really found Mr. Right, and they can he's just such a sweet man by how he takes care

of his Pitbulls and his motorcycle, and he's such an artistic soul – you should see all his amazing tattoos!

And you just listen and nod, but you know how this is going to end – in a few months you're going to be sitting on the other end of a phone call with your broken-hearted friend who just can't understand why her man cheated on her? She just didn't see this coming at all! But it was so predictable...

Or maybe its you? At the beginning of every month, you sit down and figure out your finances and put together your monthly budget and see that last month you went waaaaay over budget on fast food and eating out and you're like *"ok, I really got to get this under control,"* so you cut back on the amount you're budgeting for that and you're like *"ok this month I'm going to be disciplined and I'm going to cook and eat at home!"*

And for the first ten days you're doing well and then you hit a busy patch and you think – oh I've done well so far, I can afford this... and when you go and do your budget again the

following month you've gone waaaaay over budget yet again.
It's predictable...

So, who is the "predictable" person in your life brothers and sisters and what are the "predictable" situations that they always seem to end up in?

In the scripture passage we just read, we see that for God and for Moses the "predictable" people are the people of Israel, and the passage starts out with God speaking to Moses and Joshua about what is going to happen with the people once Moses dies.

Now we've already looked at the fact that Moses was not able to lead the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land as a consequence of his disobedience, and also perhaps his age – since he's now 120 years old. So now we see that indeed God is preparing him for that final transition that we will all face – death.

And when we face death – it's a bit predictable – we are concerned about the legacy we will leave, the work that we have invested our lives into and so it makes sense that God is speaking to Moses about the people of Israel and what will happen to them after He is no longer alive, but it's not exactly encouraging news God has for him about something he's spent 2/3 of his life investing in.

And God must tell him that while he will receive rest from the exhausting task of leading Israel, in his absence, once the people settle in the land of Canaan - they are going to cheat on God by worshiping false gods. God says "*they will prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering*" (vs 16)

This had to be discouraging for Moses, even though he knew it would be true. Maybe he had hoped that by writing down the law for them and giving them instructions about passing it on, reading it to all the people, commanding the parents to talk about it with their children that perhaps this would help keep them on the right track when they settled in the Land.

But the truth was that having the written Law wasn't enough... When Moses was alive, yes he was the source of knowledge about the content of God's Law for the people, BUT... he was also the one who lead them in obedience.

He reminded, he cajoled, he warned and scolded them to help them be motivated to follow through in obedience and observe God's law – not just because of gratitude and thanksgiving, but because it was their Covenant responsibility which they had agreed to – for them and for their children and their children's children.

So even though Moses has left them written copies of the Law, God is telling Moses that without his leadership the people are going to be unfaithful in their responsibility to be faithful covenant partners with God.

And this of course will make God angry – after all He's been faithful on His end, He's blessed them, He's bringing them into the promised land – defeating powerful nations for them, and

then they just forget about Him and worship other gods, lesser gods, false gods.

It's like bringing a girl to the big dance, and you spoil her with all the things she needs to look beautiful and pretty and get a big limo to pick her up and take you there, have a 5-star meal beforehand... and then at the dance, she starts flirting with all the other guys, dancing with them – and then end up finding her out in the hallway making out with them!

So, you can understand why this make God angry and He will respond in kind to them. If they forsake Him, He will forsake them – He will withdraw His blessing and hide His face from them and as vs. 17 says *“many calamities and disasters will come on them.”*

Now this isn't God being petty, or reactionary, no.... this is how the Covenant worked. This is what they agreed to. Remember God had said to them “IF.... IF you obey etc... THEN you will be my treasured possession and so on...” and in Ex 24:3 Moses tells the people all the terms and conditions and

“they responded with one voice, saying “Everything the Lord has said we will do.” So, God will be right to be angry, and within His covenant rights to withdraw His blessings.

However, the insult to injury that Israel will add in this situation is to turn the tables on God and in the midst of the disasters and calamities that come upon them they will accuse God of not being there for them like He had promised – God will be accused of being “predictable.” Vs. 17 they say “haven’t these disasters happened because our God is not with us?” Isn’t that just like God – always expecting us to do what he asks... but where is He when things go bad?!

Now, has anyone ever done that to you? Turned their predictable circumstances around on you and tried to make you out to be the bad guy and say that they are the victim... You are at fault for what they have brought upon themselves.

Well brothers and sisters, if anyone has done that to you, you know it’s not only frustrating and it is slander and falsehood being put upon you, which makes it all the more ironic that

just like Israel – we will predictably do the same thing to God as well.

Especially when we go through times of transition where we are expecting things to turn out a certain way and then they don’t. Maybe we expected getting married would be happily ever after – but its not... maybe we thought parenthood would be soooo fulfilling – but the kids aren’t cooperating!

Or we had planned and saved up to be comfortable in our retirement but it fell through and we have to work harder than when we were working. Maybe we’ve come to a new country seeking better opportunities – but there are fewer than where we came from...

And in the midst of these difficulties and challenges and trials and suffering we start to wonder and we ask *“Why isn’t God doing something about this? Why is God allowing this to happen? Where is God in all of this? What have I done to deserve this? Is God punishing me?”*

And God's silence or absence can push us to question further... *"Can I love a God who allows this happen? Can I serve a God who doesn't show up? Is God really good? Is He really just?"*

Or maybe even issue ultimatums to God... *"fine, you won't answer me, then I'm done with you!"*

I know these are struggles for us brothers and sisters – I've walked with you through them. And if you haven't gone through something like this – its not a matter of if... but when because our sinful human nature is... predictable.

When the difficulties and challenges of life come to us, when we go through pain and suffering and sorrow, when answers don't come and circumstances don't make sense - predictably, our sinful human response is to say, as Israel would, *"Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?"*

Now its interesting that this statement could mean two different things depending on the tone and attitude with

which it is said – and perhaps if Israel would ask if God was punishing them then they might say this phrase to reflect the reality of why God has forsaken them, *"Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?"*

They would be stating God is not with them because we were unfaithful to Him, and we've triggered the covenant consequences – He's not to blame for this. But they won't, they will continue to blame God and only push themselves farther away from any repentance and reconciliation because they are angry at God.

But the good news in response to Israel's unfaithfulness and blaming God, as God tells Moses, is that God will vindicate Himself.

Now maybe that doesn't seem like very good news to us – because if we're sympathetic to Israel's plight of feeling abandoned, we feel like something should be done for them, not for God. But its far better that God is vindicated brothers and sisters because everything depends on Him and to see

Him proved right and true means we can still count on all that He has said and done, and that can serve to carry us through difficult circumstances.

But if God was found to be “predictable” in a bad way, as Israel has accused Him of being, then we have no hope at all – as our very existence depends on Him.

So – the good news is that God is going to vindicate Himself to Israel by means of a song, and thus stating for the record, as He has for Moses, and for posterity’s sake - that He is fully aware of Israel’s disposition even before He brought them into the Promised Land, which proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is a very good God.

Who else, other than an exceedingly good God, will knowingly bless the socks off of a group of people who are going to turn around and spurn Him and give themselves to other gods!?

And the song that God gives to Moses, as it says in vs. 19 will be a witness for God against Israel, that is it will speak of

God’s goodness and remind the people - it is their unfaithfulness which is the reason for God’s absence, He is not petty or capricious!

Furthermore, though Israel will forget God – God will ensure they do not forget this song. In vs. 21 He states that it will not be forgotten by their descendants.

Now, a lot us might be tempted to ascribe this mnemonic success to the power of music and singing and make a big deal about the kinds of songs we sing that help us to remember our faith. And I will grant that God’s good creation of music can do a great deal of good work.

However – is music powerful enough to overcome human sinfulness? If God’s Law comes up short against it – why do we think music and singing would succeed? It won’t.

So – when God states they will not forget this song, I think this is God hinting that He himself is going to remind them through the prophets that He will send.

As we now know, the message of the Old Testament prophets was always to tell the people they had broken covenant with God and they needed to repent and return to faithfulness either to avoid the consequences or as a way out of the oppression and disaster they were currently experiencing.

So, this song that Moses will teach to Israel is not about the power of music, but about the power of God; the power of the Spirit of God that rested upon the prophets and the Word of God which they spoke, so that Israel would never forget that the song testified to God's goodness and their unfaithfulness, vindicating God and indicting them – and always showing them they can repent and return to God.

Now brothers and sisters, how does this good news apply to us? Well, it's a bit tricky.

You see Israel could legitimately ask if God was punishing them, and then quite easily look at the Law to see what it was they were doing wrong, repent of it, offer the proper sacrifices and return to God's blessings, and when they failed to do this

God sent prophets to help them clue in and tell them why they were being punished.

But for us to ask if God is legitimately punishing us is actually the same as Israel turning the tables on God and making him responsible for what they brought on themselves.

For us to accuse God of punishing us... not only impugns God's character, but it also shows we are being a bit predictable in forgetting how God vindicated Himself with Israel through this song that was taught to them.

You see the whole dynamic of the song was based on God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness and rebellious inability to stay faithful as a Covenant partner with God, and that God was aware of this all along.

Ultimately God vindicates Himself in this predictable Covenant relationship with Israel by taking on their responsibilities Himself, becoming - not just human - but one of His chosen people in Jesus Christ, and then in Jesus' life and ministry and

death and resurrection God himself is being the perfect Covenant partner with Himself that the people of Israel could never be.

And God's goodness is on display again when He willingly accepts Jesus' Covenant faithfulness in place of Israel's unfaithfulness, and He satisfied the terms of the Covenant consequences for unfaithfulness when Jesus takes the punishment for that sin upon himself – one time for all!

You see brothers and sisters, what we understand as sin and sinning is really Covenant unfaithfulness with God, and we are all incapable... more than that, we are all guilty of being unfaithful Covenant partners with God whether it's in the specifics of the Law of Moses, or the trust and faith required by the Promise to Abraham and Noah, or the willingness to acknowledge God as our Creator and obeying our calling to steward the creation according to God's design – but Jesus' stood in our place to take the punishment for ALL of that.

So, there is absolutely no way, that God will then punish anyone whom Christ has already been punished for. There is no way for anyone who has been given Christ's perfect covenant fulfilment to stand as their own to come up short in their life before God and deserve punishing.

That's our good news brothers and sisters, that is what we must never forget!

God has removed ALL punishment, put it ALL on Jesus – why do we twist things around and doubt this, or accuse God of doing it, or claim that God's not being fair, or that we don't deserve what we're going through??

That's the predictable reality of our sinful nature brothers and sisters, but the additional good news is that we still have a song to remind us of the reality of our sin and Christ's forgiveness and God's justification and our Sanctification – being made more and more holy as we grow in faith and obedience.

You see just as this Song was repeated by the OT Prophets to the people of Israel, the fulfillment of this Song in Jesus Christ is repeated for us by the Holy Spirit, speaking to us through His New Testament grace-gift of Prophecy.

Now I'm not talking about the 'predictable' kind of "end-time prophecy" that dispensational televangelist hucksters try to sell you. Trying to predict world events preceding Christ's return.

I'm talking about the Holy Spirit empowered anointed preaching of the Word of God and the proclamation of the Gospel that points our sins, brings conviction that we deserve God's judgement, but gives us hope and trust in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, and the faith to receive and believe it, and the willingness to live in obedience to God.

That's New-Testament Grace-gift Prophecy brothers and sisters... when someone is preaching, or teaching, or praying, or speaking, or singing... and you're experiencing conviction, grace, mercy, hope, forgiveness, faith, trust, encouragement

and the willingness to obey – that's the Holy Spirit singing the song to remind you!

Why? Because as our Lord Jesus said in John 16:33 when He was promising the Holy Spirit *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

So that's the word in this message for us this morning brothers and sisters, that as we go through the transitions God brings us through, as we face the inevitable trouble in this world and in our lives, that we won't say *"these disasters have come on us because our God is not with us"* and we won't even question if we deserve it or not or wonder if God is punishing us...

Instead, we will say with Romans 8: 16- 17 *"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings - in order that we may also share in his glory."*

And we will remind ourselves of Hebrews 12:7,11 to *“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

And we will trust Romans 8:28 *“that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

So Brothers and sisters – in whatever challenges you may be facing in life, in whatever struggles you are wrestling with, in whatever pain or sorrows you are having to endure, remember the song, listen for the song, be reminded of the song that the Holy Spirit continues to prophesy to us, so that it becomes predictable of us – in a good way – that we will testify that God is good, God is with us, and God is not punishing us, but God is transforming us and bringing us into His Promised Land in the life to come. Amen.