

Sabbath, 21st January 2024

SERMON : DELIVERANCE

In fact, what happened to human life, especially in the early society, is not far from the biblical narratives. Each generation had its own kingdom, led by its rulers ; and the usual way of increasing and enlarging the kingdom was to invade other kingdoms and take in captivity their people, their possessions, and their lands. In the Bible, there are stories of kings like Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who captured the Israelites. Prior to the Israelite people, the situation was experienced by many different countries because there were famous and powerful kingdoms such as Egypt, the Eastern states known as Chaldeans, etc... who attacked those who were more vulnerable than them.

Let's take as an example the story of Abraham, which is the most widely known in the biblical account. Abraham comes from the Eastern part of the world, in Ur of the Chalde'ans. Along with his nephew Lot, the family moved to the Canaanite territory. Both Abraham and his nephew, who was with him, later became very rich, especially concerning flocks and herds, and they had to separate. As a result, Lot and his family moved to Sodom because it seemed to be better in Lot's eyes. Sodom was surrounded by a number of powerful kings who were tempted to take it. According to a biblical statement:

« In the days of Am'raphel king of Shinar, Ar'i-och king of Ella'sar, Ched-or-lao'mer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goi'im, these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomor'rah, Shinab king of Admah, Sheme'ber king of Zeboi'im, and the king of Bela (that is, Zo'ar). All these joined forces in the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). » Genesis 14; 1-3

In this war, the king of Sodom and his companions were defeated and taken captive. It was then Abraham thought about the deliverance of these people. So he arranged every thing in order to accomplish this liberation. We all know that freedom is important, whether it is in life in general or in the spiritual life. We know very well for example that Jesus is also a liberator. So, let's consider especially in a while this question of liberation ; and from the story of Abraham and Lot at Sodom, we will also see how we can adapt it to the reality that we face.

I. LIBERATION PERFORMED BY ABRAHAM

This liberation performed by Abraham was a very special and extraordinary one as he had no kingdom, so he was not yet engaged into wars like the others. Here is the

statement of Ellen White, a well-known American writer, in her book entitled *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 135:

" The worshiper of Jehovah had not only rendered a great service to the country, but had proved himself a man of valor. It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed. His heroic act gave him a widespread influence among the surrounding tribes»

I would like to focus on the word *courageous*. It is a word that is heard here and there in Madagascar when the date of March 29 is coming: "national heroes" can be seen in many aspects, but nevertheless it is necessary to be courageous, not only in war, but also in different many ways.

One of the great things about the liberation undertaken by Abraham is that it can be described as a wonderful one. Look at Genesis 14:16,

"He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his goods, and the women and the people."

A real total liberation ! Honestly, when I consider it, I think that if every liberation was like it, the nation would have gone far. This spirit of liberation is important not only for the communion with God but also among the fellowmen : the spirit of exploitation of others is of no benefit to the nation, and what should dwell in everyone's heart is to seek the welfare of fellowmen and citizens, because if we do so, liberation has far more meaning, just as it happened in the days of Abraham.

There is a clear feeling that love has motivated Abraham to undertake this liberation of Lot and the people of Sodom. That's why it's important to learn from this story. In the light of God's Word, there is much to be said about love, but what is to do is that love should motivate us in all of our acts and deeds.

II. OTHER LIBERATIONS IN THE BIBLE

If we look at the kinds of deliverance in the Bible, we will not have enough time for them all, but we will only see two of them which can help us to know God's will.

God said to Moses,

"I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites, a land flowing with milk and honey." - Exodus 3:17

We can see here that God accomplished the deliverance in a different way than in Abraham's time when war was needed to be engaged, but here the people of Israel were delivered through God's Providence.

Deuteronomy 7:17-19 says,

"If you say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I,' how can I dispossess them? You shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh, and to all Egypt, the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the LORD your God brought you out : so will the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. »

In short, these words affirm that deliverance comes from God alone and in all respects. There are many things that people worry about, but here the Lord says: "Do not be afraid.... Remember what the Lord your God has done before. » And that's why you and me are now holding this solemn ceremony to remember all the good things He has done for you, for me and for the whole nation.

The second example of liberation confirms it, and I would like to attract your attention on what happened in Esther's time. We remember Haman's condemnation against God's people and what Esther did to bring deliverance : prayer and fasting. The Word of God says,

"Then Esther told them to reply to Mor'decai , saying, "Go. Gather all the Jews to be in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. And I and my maids will also fast as you do, Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law: and if I perish, I perish. » - Esther 4:15, 16

Considering this story of Esther, we can say that the true liberation came from God. So, when we talk about liberation, we should not forget what God has already done, but put our full trust in Him as He knows what is good for us.

III. WHAT IS GOOD TO DO WHEN IT COMES TO LIBERATION

If we go back to the story of Abraham in Genesis, we can see that he and his team won the victory. So, when they returned, Abraham approached Melchizedek as recorded in Genesis 14:18-20:

"And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth ; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. »

What can we understand by that ? It is simple : taking time to thank God. It is important and necessary to bring everything to Him ; it is the most precious time

because, here, it was not only a time for Abraham to thank God, but it was also a time for Abraham to receive a blessing from God. The psalmist says:

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as his heritage ." - Psalm 33:12.

In this true story, we can see God offering also His blessing. And at this special time when we all remember the struggle for the liberation of Madagascar, I think it's very good that our beloved nation also receives God's blessing.

CONCLUSION

God's intervention in human history is innumerable when it comes to the question of liberation. And when God sets free, He does it in all respects. Jesus said :

"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). .

We thank God because we have liberty today. We cannot forget nor ignore that it is the result of the efforts of some Malagasy motivated by the love for the country. It is good and fair that we remember that. But it is better to answer the question: **how do we live and will live the freedom that is now obtained? The best way I want to suggest you is to walk always with God. I wish that He says to each Malagasy the same thing He said to Jacob:**

"And the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers, and to your kindred; and I will be with you. » - Genesis 31:3

Amen!!

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