

The Parable of the Eagle

Deuteronomy 32:11-12

Dear congregation, perhaps you've asked this question: "what is God doing in my life?" Perhaps you've asked this question at a time when difficulties seemed to overwhelm you, when it was difficult to understand why things were the way they were, perhaps it seemed as if things were falling apart quite literally around you.

Well, we do know that difficulties, even great difficulties, are to be expected in life. Also in the life of a believer; maybe especially in the life of faith. And yet we also know from the Word of God that the Lord has promised that all things, *all things*, not only the good, but also the bad, and even the worst, will work together for good according to God's faithful promise.

That truth is illustrated for us in our text passage today, which you can find in Deuteronomy 32 in verses 11 and 12, where we read these words: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

Our theme, looking to the Lord, is "The Parable of the Eagle." We'll see, first of all, the picture, and secondly, the lessons: five lessons. The parable of the eagle, the picture and the lessons.

Well, congregation, Moses is concluding his final sermon to the people of Israel on the plains of Moab, just outside the Promised Land which the people are to inherit. He will die very soon, but before he does, he teaches the people a song. A song that God gave him to teach the people, because he says in chapter 31, this song would be a witness against them in the future down through the ages.

Even young children know that a song sticks with you, and in you, doesn't it? Often much more than a sermon or a verse, a song has a power over our mind, over our emotions, and over our heart. That's why it's important, parents, to teach our children good songs, and to have them sing biblical songs, especially the Psalms, so that through their lifetime they would stay with them. God forbid, even when perhaps they've forgotten much of your teaching, or have pushed it away and don't open the Scriptures, but still the songs that you have taught them would stay with them. How beautiful children's voices are when they sing songs, and how the Lord can use these words in the lives of their parents and others around them!

That's exactly what Moses says in Deuteronomy 31:21. He says, "This song...shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed." In other words, the children will remember this song, and when they sing this song, the Lord will use this. It will be a witness. It will be a testimony to who the Lord is, and what He deserves.

Deuteronomy 32 is really this song, this final song of Moses. If you were to read through this whole chapter, you would see that there's three parts. The first, verses 1 through 14, is about the faithfulness of God, the faithfulness of Jehovah. The second part, verses 15 through 28, is about the unfaithfulness of His people, their unfaithfulness. And then the last part, which is verses 29 through 43, is about God's judgment, when God arises to show His adversaries that He is God, and He alone.

So, God's faithfulness, His people's unfaithfulness, and God's judgment upon His enemies, proving that He alone is God. Our text words, verses 11 and 12, are from this first section celebrating the faithfulness of God. This picture of the eagle is really a

picture of the history of Israel up till this point. But before we go there, children, have you ever seen an eagle? What a powerful animal it is! It's often referred to as the king of the sky. Just like the lion is the king of the jungle, so the eagle, because of its power and majesty, is the king of the sky.

People put live cameras up close to an eagle's nest, and you can see what's going on. You'll see how the father and mother eagle make this great nest, this big nest that sometimes can weigh up to a ton. Imagine that! How much work they put into that nest, either high up in a tree or in some rocky area in a mountain.

The mother eagle usually has two or three eaglets at a time, and once these eggs are hatched, it takes about 100 days in which the mother eagle and the father eagle just bring food to keep these eaglets alive, day by day. The eaglets are growing there in this nest, in the safety and comfort of the nest, but after about 90 to 100 days, all of a sudden something strange begins to happen. The mother eagle begins to tear at the nest and to break it down! She begins to nudge and push the eaglets out of their nest in a seemingly harsh way. And these eaglets, they squawk and they resist until they literally fall out of the nest and there they go, down, down, down!

And yet, the mother eagle keeps her eye on this falling eaglet and stays very close to the eaglet, fluttering over it as our text says, staying very close above and then swooping down underneath the eaglet when it's necessary. The mother eagle is doing two things when it's flying above this little eaglet: it's spreading its own wings, it's fluttering over the young birds and it's modelling to these eaglets how they should use their own wings. And scientists say that actually the upswing of the mother eagle's wings creates a movement, an uplift in the little eaglet's wings. So it's teaching, it's training the little eaglet what to do. But the eaglet will fall further and further and then the mother swoops underneath it and carries this young eaglet up once again higher and higher until the process begins again and the eaglet falls again, and the process is continued until the eaglet can fly.

And this is exactly what Moses says here, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "As the eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them and beareth them on her wings: So the LORD..."

Now Moses, as a shepherd in the desert for 40 years when he was taking care of the flock of Jethro, must have seen this in the desert of Sinai. He saw there how creation is a book, and how it testifies, as Romans 1 says, of the invisible things of God. It provides pictures of who God is and of what God does. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses sees what an eagle does with its eaglets. He saw that that is exactly what the Lord did with Israel.

There was Israel: comfortable in Goshen. Joseph providing for them all sorts of things from the king's household in Egypt. They had a comfortable nest there in Goshen, the best part of that area, and they were being provided with everything that their hearts could desire. Yet, after a time, there arose a Pharaoh that knew not Joseph and it seemed that God was breaking down their nest. He was tearing apart their comfort and making things difficult for them, even to the point that they were made slaves of the Egyptians, and what a harsh existence this was. And then finally they were pushed out of Egypt by God's mighty hand and outstretched arm.

And then they were in the wilderness and what did two million people do in the wilderness? It seemed like an impossible situation. It seemed like a free-fall. What are they to do? How can they survive? How can they live? Aren't they doomed to die? And so like these little eaglets squawk and resist, so Israel complained and murmured against the Lord. This seemed so wrong. The Lord was, of course, with them with a pillar of cloud. This pillar of cloud that spread, as it were, over the people. The Lord was representing there that He was with them. The Lord would speak to them

out of this pillar of cloud by day, and this pillar of fire by night. The Lord was keeping them. The Lord was shading them, and sheltering them from the hot sun there in the wilderness. And each time again when it seemed like the Israelites would perish because they lacked food, or they lacked water, or the Amalekites were after them, the Lord would, as it were, swoop underneath them and keep them from plunging into destruction. And He would lift them up again and He'd raise them up: manna from heaven and water from the rock, and victory over the Amalekites, and so much more! The Lord would once again lift them up, and how thankful they were, and how secure, but then the process would start again!

And the whole history of Israel was like that, a free-fall, yet the Lord catching his people. And so Moses says in Exodus 19:4, "You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians and how I bear you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself." Well, congregation, this is the picture.

It's amazing how many testimonies nature has of the invisible things of God, of the eternal power and Godhead of God, but let's look at some of these things that are pictured for us about God in this picture of the eagle and its young.

The **first lesson** congregation, should be obvious to all of us, is the sovereignty of God. It's not an accident that Moses compares the Lord here to an eagle, for as I already said, the eagle is the king of the sky. Its keen eye sees, as it were, everything, even the smallest thing on the ground from a great distance. Its high nest towers over everything. Its nearly 2.5 metre wingspan. Its swift flight that takes it from its tall nest, and swoops down to almost instantaneously have what it wants. With its strong beak and talons, who is a match to them? It's a picture of majesty, a picture of independence, of strength, of penetrating sight.

Job 39 pictures the judgment of a sovereign God as displayed by the eagle in the heavens. Psalm 103 speaks about our youth being renewed like that of an eagle, and that's probably because an eagle is able to regrow feathers. Halfway through its life, the eagle's feathers can grow hard, which makes flight difficult. So it goes to a place apart, and it plucks its own feathers and regrows them, and so its youth is renewed. This speaks, then, of how the Lord is able to renew His people, and how the Lord is eternal. He is steadfast. He changes not. And the Lord can give that also to His people.

Do we view God as the sovereign over all things, the majestic God? No one would trifle with an eagle, but many trifle with God in our world, and also in the church? If that's you, my friend, tonight, God dwells on high and He beholds with eagle-eyed precision and accuracy the smallest detail. He knows the secrets of our hearts. He knows what dwells within. Nothing is hid from Him.

Indeed, the eagle can see far and can do much, but God can see and do so much more! The Bible tells us that He dwells on high, and beholds from heaven the children of men. He tries the children of men and He will at the last, appear in judgment upon all those who have disobeyed the gospel. That is sure. There is none greater than God. There's none that can escape the judgment of God. He does whatsoever He pleases.

The whole earth should fear Him. And He should be had in reverence by all the inhabitants of the earth. Friends, one day God is coming out of His holy habitation for judgment upon everyone that has ever lived. God is King forever. Let the nations tremble. My unconverted friend, to meet Him that day as an adversary, you won't be able to hide from Him. You will not be able to escape His judgment in that day. You need Him today! You must come under Him today. You must bow the knee before Him today. Reverence God. Stand in awe of him.

The **second lesson** is a picture of the love of God. Perhaps you think that seems a contradiction to what I just said, but as powerful as the eagle is, Moses has here something in view that speaks of love, of faithfulness. The Bible frequently compares God, and God's love, to that of a father or a mother. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Or "Can a mother forget her young child so that she would not have compassion upon the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." If the Lord compares Himself here to a loving father and a loving mother, He even condescends to compare himself to the love, the creaturely love that an eagle has for its young.

As we saw, it builds this amazing nest. It cares for its young for 100 days. It provides for them, feeding them, dedicating even 100 days of its life to the selfless, self-sacrificing care of this helpless, this weak, this thankless creature. These little eaglets would have no chance of survival if it weren't for the mother eagle and the father eagle providing for them.

When we translate this to the Lord, how much fuller the love of God is, for the Lord doesn't just care for you, child of God, for 100 days, not even for 100 years, but from eternity to eternity! His love is ever the same. "I've loved you," he says, "with an everlasting love." And how thankless we often are. How selfish we are. How unfaithful, as this text goes on to say we are, and yet He abides faithful. He cannot, and will not, deny Himself. And what a wonder it is, child of God, that when this eagle, this king of the sky, appears over the nest, you see his love. You see his faithfulness. And you say, "Great is thy faithfulness."

God's love is so un-ending. It's so un-bending. It's so glorious. It's so free. Nothing that I ever have done, or could do, deserves what He does for me. As the eagle, so the Lord.

But besides the sovereignty of God, and the love of God, we have here also **thirdly**, the training by God. Parents, you are called by God to train up your children in the fear of the Lord, and that means doing hard things, as the eagle itself must do here. Part of the training here that the eagle does with its young is to stir up the nest, to break it down, to push the eaglet over the edge and into the open air. That, congregation, is not cruelty. It's actually care, as cruel as it may seem to the eaglet, or at some level, to us. But imagine that the mother eagle never did that to its young, and it just left them there in the nest and just provided for them. The eaglet would grow large and heavy, and one day it would topple out of the nest because it would simply outgrow the nest, and would fall to its destruction.

And so it is care and love to break down this nest and to push this eaglet over the edge and to flutter over it and to come under it, teaching it to fly. This is exactly what the Lord does in your life, child of God. Perhaps you enjoy comfort and peace, a comfortable time in your life, where really in a certain sense you're in the nest of God's care, of his love, of his provision. Every day again, he's meeting your needs and so faithful, so amazing you can take it for granted, you think it will be there again and again and then all of a sudden something happens. It seems like things are different. It seems even that God has changed. That's what it feels like. He's tearing away at your comforts. He's breaking them all down and it seems cruel and upsetting and unsettling and disturbing. And we squawk, don't we? And we complain and we murmur against the Lord, but that doesn't help any. It doesn't do anything because just like the mother eagle does not stop what she's doing because of the squawking of the eaglet, the mother eagle doesn't ask the opinion of the little eaglet. She knows what's right. She knows what's necessary and she tears this nest to pieces and pushes the eaglet out.

But friends, again, I say that's love. That's God's design because, dear believers, we haven't been created for nests. We've been created to fly, to soar high, to imitate our Father in heaven, and to show his nature, and the nature he has given his people, and like the eagle itself, the Lord makes us and calls us to rule and to reign over our enemies, over sin, Satan, and the devil and we can't do that from the nest of our comfortability. But we don't understand it in the moment, and the Lord doesn't explain it to us either, what he is doing and why he is doing it. He simply does what pleases him and what is good ultimately for his children. But remember this, that when the Lord does this, he doesn't abandon you, child of God. He flutters over you, even when you can't feel it, even when you wonder and all you can see is the deep beneath you and the rocks below you. But he's there and he's modeling for you what you must do to spread your wings and there's even that uplift that he makes to happen as he is there by his Spirit and he's creating this energy. And ever so little and ever so slightly, the little eaglet begins to flap its wings. I'm told that the mother eagle, during these times of training, as it flutters above its young, will even cluck over them and coo over the eaglet to reassure it, to make it to know that she's there, that she's nearby, that she has a plan, and thus encourage the eaglet in the midst of this free-fall, down, down, down.

And certainly spiritually, the Lord is with his people, even in their afflictions, even in their falls, even in their trials, and his word often means more than ever before; his promises, they're so real, so necessary, so precious and the Holy Spirit of God seals those promises to the hearts of his people in the midst of their trials and difficulties. "Lo, I am with you even to the end of the world. I will not forsake thee. I cannot forsake mine own. The work that he has for me begun shall by his grace be fully done."

And so the Lord assures his people, speaking his word and applying it by his Spirit and he makes the soul of this believer in trial to sense and believe the faithfulness of God, even when everything seems contrary to it. And we wait upon the Lord, we look to the Lord, and we say in accordance with the Lord's own word, "Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and he shall strengthen thy heart." Wait I say, on the Lord." As the eagle, so the Lord.

but besides the sovereignty of God and the love of God and the training by God, there's also very clearly the protection of God.

Fourthly, the protection of God. Part of this training is that the eagle at the critical moment comes underneath the eaglet. When this eaglet cannot fly and without the mother eagle coming underneath the eaglet would dash itself against the rocks, so this mother eagle puts herself between the falling eaglet and her destruction, between her and the rocks below. And that is a great mystery and a great gift. Just think in terms of Peter, the disciple Peter. When he came out of the ship and he walked on the water and the waves were all around him, as he walked there, you could say in a certain sense, he was flapping his little wings. He was believing in Christ. He was looking to Christ. And yet, at a certain moment, he looked at the waves and he began to sink and like this little eaglet, he's sinking and there's destruction underneath him, and he cries, "Lord, save me!" And what does the Lord Jesus do? He reaches out and underneath there is his arm that holds Peter up. And much like this is what happened when Peter denied the Lord Jesus Christ. He had boasted in his prosperity that he would never be moved but in that moment of fear and trepidation, he was falling, his wings seemed to be entirely clipped, seemed like unbelief was reigning in his heart and nothing more, and yet you can read how even in that moment when it seems like Peter's going to destroy himself that the Lord Jesus looked at him, he turned and looked at Peter and in that look there's everything that self-destroying Peter needs to hold onto him, to come underneath him, to come to that place where he will not and cannot dash his foot upon the stone. And it's Christ who does that. It's Christ who's in the gap. It's Christ that's underneath where Peter deserves to be. Christ is there and he's holding on to Peter and he says, as it were, "Peter, I take your place in the judgment and in death and

under the curse. What you deserve, I go there. I take that so that you need not and you are safe you are secure."

Dear believer, you know the text, don't you, that he shall keep thee from falling and preserve thee. Peter understood that and spoke in his epistle about that, kept by the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed. If it weren't for the keeping love of God, Peter would be lost. And so you, dear believer as well, it's Christ, it's his death, his resurrection, his love, his substitution, his taking your place that makes a world of difference, that makes an eternity of difference. And that's the gospel. That's the gospel also of baptism where the Lord comes and he says even to these little children and to all of us here, "I will be a God unto you. I can take care of you. I can wash your hearts and your souls clean. I can renew your life. I can keep you from destruction. I can make you so that you mount up with wings like eagles." And that's the promise of God and it's signified in seal in baptism, and it's all over the Word of God. "I, even I, can keep you. I can hold you fast when everything around you and everything inside you is falling and falling fast."

Even congregation, the very cross itself and the outstretched arms of the Lord Jesus Christ and his praying heart when he's praying for his disciples as he does in the high priestly prayer, he says, "Keep them Father. Keep them. I pray not that thou wouldst take them out of the world, but thou wouldst keep them from the evil one." That's the heart of Christ. That's why he went to the cross and his arms are stretched out still for sinners still today to find it in him and to find it in him alone. He alone can hold us up when everything around us is falling and sinking. "Lord, hold me fast. Lord, hold me up. Lord, don't let me perish. Don't let me go on without thee. Come and save me."

As the eagle, so the Lord.

But congregation, besides the sovereignty of God and the love of God, the training by God, and the protection of God, there is this final thought, it's the uniqueness of God and this is especially in the very end of our text. "So the LORD alone did lead him and there was no strange god with him." What does that mean? Well, we said that the context here is about the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of God's people and how often did Israel not go after strange gods, after idols, starting with the golden calf and their whole history. Like your history, dear believer, is your heart going out after strange gods, after other gods, whatever they may be, securities that we find for ourselves, materialism, or people, or whatever it may be. But God is saying to Israel here, "I alone lead my people," and there's no strange god with them. And isn't that exactly what happens to us when we're in the midst of being kicked out of the nest and we start to fall, don't we sometimes say, "Who's doing all this?" It almost seems as if God's hand is shortened and that there are forces at work that are beyond God or outside of God. And we know Satan is powerful, but God says even though he's powerful, he's not God. "There is no God besides me. I do what I please. I kill," as he says later in this chapter, "and make alive. I wound and I heal. It's all my purpose. And it's a purpose with my people that is for good."

No strange god. You see congregation, that's what the Lord is teaching us in afflictions is to wean us away from securities and from gods and from idols that we look to and hope in, because they won't help us and they don't help us in the midst of our afflictions and our free-falls. It's the Lord alone who comes both above us and underneath us. The Lord alone leads his people and there's no strange god with us. What is that materialism going to do for you? That bank account? All these things that you've set in place? And people, what are they going to do for you? When you're falling like this, you need the Lord and the Lord alone will do and the Lord wants you, child of God, to trust him just like that eaglet, to trust the all-wise purposes of God, who's never far from you. Though you see him not, and all that seems to be before you and beneath you is a chasm and the rocks of destruction, the Lord is right there, and his eye is on the sparrow, his eye is on you, and

he watches you every second, and he does what he wants to do and he cares for you, and his love is stronger than death. The calling for all of us here today is to trust God, even in the dark, even in the training, even in the free-falls that make you feel like the end is very near and you say with David, "I will one day perish at the hand of Saul," and yet to trust the Lord. As this eaglet needs to trust its mother so you too, child of God, must trust in the Lord alone, in the Lord alone, whose grace and power are shown to all that look to him for grace.

As we close congregation, my unconverted friend here tonight, there's a warning for you. You may think that this world is a comfortable nest for you where you have what you need, but if you're simply feeding yourself and ripening yourself for the day when without any wings, without any ability to escape, you fall and fall and fall to your ruin, what will your gods do for you? What will you do for yourself? When that child of God who has all the hardship that perhaps you don't have, he has a God as his refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. If you're here tonight, and you don't know this God, and your life has been one of unfaithfulness to your Creator, to the God of the scriptures, God still comes to you in the gospel and God says, "I alone can lead also you. I'm the only one in life and in death that can make a difference in your life. Every other idol, every other refuge will prove vain." Would that God would convict you and break down this nest of comfortability around you, make you to squawk, to cry, to beg for God's mercy, because that's for your good.

That's what we need congregation, all of us. If we're at ease, believer or unbeliever here tonight, if we're at ease in sin, then we should really tremble because it's far better in affliction to not know where to turn except the Lord himself than to simply be at ease and ripening ourselves for an eternity without God. O friend, seek God tonight. His arms are outstretched still. The gospel is for sinners. It's for sinners like you and like me. And people of God, are you flying? Are you spreading your wings to fly as the Lord has ordained for you to do? You say, what does it mean to fly? To fly means to believe the word of God, to trust him, to trust his promises that he's speaking to you from his word, to look to him, to depend on him, to go with him. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, waiting upon the Lord, that means looking to him, trusting his wise designs. They will renew their strength. They will mount up on wings like eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint. Perhaps your wings don't work well. You feel like you're in a free-fall. It can be like that. God is training us in the midst of that. He's growing our weak faith. How we ought to pray the Lord increase our faith. "Lord, give me faith. Grow my faith." But never forget, child of God, the God who you've begun to trust, he's lower than you, he's underneath you, he's gone all the way and he will hold you up. He will hold you fast. He will not let anything separate you from his love which is in Christ Jesus. He cannot. He would lose more than you, he would lose his honor.

Trust the Lord alone. Let Israel trust in God alone. As the eagle, so the Lord.

Amen