

When the Library Burns Down

Introduction:

1. The Royal Library of Alexandria (Egypt) was one of the largest and most magnificent libraries of the ancient world.
2. It flourished under the Ptolemaic dynasty and functioned as a major center of scholarship from its construction in the 3rd century B.C. until the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 B.C.
3. It included collections of works, lecture halls, meeting rooms and gardens.
4. Alexandria was considered the capital of knowledge and learning, in part because of the Great Library. It was part of a larger research institution called the Museum of Alexandria. Here many of the most famous thinkers of the ancient world studied.
5. Scholars differ on how the library was destroyed. Plutarch (Life of Caesar) describes how Julius Caesar, under siege in 48 B.C. set fire to his own ships and that this fire spread to the library.
6. The destruction of the library has become a symbol of the great loss of ancient works and public knowledge.
7. When libraries burn the loss is irretrievable.
8. But I am convinced that the people of God constitute a great library of wisdom and knowledge that if lost causes the whole world to suffer an irretrievable loss. It is about this library, its wisdom and its preservation, that I want to direct your attention.

Discussion:

- I. The people of God are a library connecting generations with their past, and their future.
 - A. This is a principle that God taught His people, Israel (Deut. 4:1-8).
 1. The commandments and the statutes came from God.
 2. They were directly associated with God's actions among them.
 - a. "Your eyes have seen what the Lord has done . . ." (v. 3).
 - b. "What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God?" (vs. 7-8).
 3. They had a responsibility to communicate this knowledge to the coming generations (Deut. 4:9).
 - B. The Book of Deuteronomy itself is designed to accomplish this very objective.
 1. The book opens with a rehearsal of God's activity among the people.
 2. Chapters 1-2-3-4 remind the people of their history after the Exodus.
 3. Chapter 5 reminds them of the covenant terms in what we know as the ten commandments.
 - C. The instruction looked back to the promises made to their forefathers (Deut. 7:12-13) but it also looked forward to what God would provide for them (Deut. 7:14-16).
 - D. The people of God in the first century looked back to this same wisdom and worked to communicate it to the people of their day.
 1. How can we read such sermons as that of Peter on Pentecost without understanding that he is connecting the events of his day with the wisdom of the Great Library of God's people? His quotations from Joel and David alone are

sufficient testimony.

2. How can we read the great sermon of Stephen without understanding the relevance of the Great Library of wisdom associated with God's people? He traces their history from Abraham, through Joseph, to Egypt, to Moses, to the Exodus and connects all to Jesus.

E. The people of God today are a Great Library connecting generations with their past and their future, and showing the relevance of this present time to the movement of history in the plan of God.

II. Parents are a library connecting their children to their lineage (Deut. 6:7).

A. Many of us are concerned to connect our children with their genetic lineage and so we study our ancestry. Where did we come from? One of the popular things today is DNA. We ask ourselves when and where did our ancestors migrate to North America?

B. This is not the lineage we are concerned about here. We are concerned about who we are and our place in the plan of God.

1. Moses was concerned that Israel understand their relationship to the promises God made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).

2. Paul was concerned that those of his day understand their relationship to the same promises (Gal. 3:15ff).

C. Parents are to communicate these things to their children (Deut. 6:7; Eph. 6:4). They are a library connecting their children to their lineage. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are my forefathers. They are part of who I am as a son of God. Their story is my story.

III. Grandparents are a library connecting young people to their heritage (Deut. 6:2).

A. I am sorry that I do not know more about my grandparents and my great grandparents. I know very little about their lives. Three of my grandparents were deceased before I was old enough to be aware. I know almost nothing of my great grandparents. Even their names are fuzzy. What an irretrievable loss!

B. But what is more important is that I communicate to my grandchildren who we are as the people of God.

1. I want them to know who father Abraham was.

2. I want them to know about King David.

3. I want them to know how God preserved our people in Egypt.

4. I want them to know how our God prepared for us a kingdom.

5. I want them to know about the sending of Jesus and the preparations that have been made for us for eternity.

6. If the library burns down the loss is a calamity of epic proportions!

IV. How do we do it?

A. We must tell the story (Deut. 6:7ff).

- B. This is done in various ways.
 - 1. Teaching both formally and informally. Moses and the Prophets wrote down the story. The N.T. continues the same written format.
 - 2. Traditions and memorials perpetuate the story.
 - a. The Passover exemplifies this (Ex. 12:43-49; 13:3-16; Deut. 6:20-25).
 - b. The Lord's Supper too (1 Cor. 11:23ff).
- C. We need to create a sense of identity with WHO we are as the people of God.
- D. We need to make the message clear and plain (Deut. 13:1ff; 18:9ff; 2 Pet. 2:1ff; 2 Tim. 3:1ff).

V. What happens when we fail? When the library burns?

- A. The history is lost.
- B. The connection with the past is lost.
- C. Relationship with God is lost.
- D. Our identity is lost.
 - 1. P. D. Eastman (1960) wrote a children's book entitled, **Are You My Mother?**
 - a. It is about a little bird whose mother left him in the nest as he was about to come out of the shell. She left him to find him something to eat.
 - b. The bird hatched while his mother was gone.
 - c. He fell out of the nest and went looking for his mother.
 - d. He walked past her without even seeing her. He didn't even know what his mother looked like.
 - e. He found a kitten, a hen, a dog and a cow. He found an old car, a boat and an airplane. Unlike many of us, he did not associate his identity with a car, a boat or any other thing.
 - f. Then he came across what he described as a SNORT! It is represented by Eastman as a steam shovel. It was mysterious and noisy. The little bird was not aware of the wisdom of the man operating, but it put him back in the nest.
 - g. And so it is with the Great Library of wisdom. It puts us back in the nest. It connects us with our beginning. It places us in history. It defines who we are and gives us our identity as the People of God.
 - 2. And if the library burns down??
 - a. The nation of Israel began to identify with the nations around them. They identified with their idols. And we do the same things. If we fail to communicate the wisdom of God; if we identify with the idols of materialism, pleasure and sensuality the library is burned and there is a calamitous loss.
 - b. The glorious future that God has planned for His people is eclipsed by kingdom of darkness and the domain of death.

Conclusion:

- 1. You are a Great Library. Are you connecting generations with their past and their future? Are you connecting your children and grandchildren to their lineage and heritage as the people of God?
- 2. This congregation is a library connecting the wisdom of God and the people of the world.
- 3. What if the library burns down?

4. We are looking for patrons. Would you be one?