

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

1 Kings 8:(1,6,10-11), 22-30, 41-43

^{8:1} Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. ⁶ Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. ¹⁰ And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, ¹¹ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. ²³ He said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, ²⁴ the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. ²⁵ Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.' ²⁶ Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David. ²⁷ "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!

²⁸ Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; ²⁹ that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. ³⁰ Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

⁴¹ "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name ⁴² --for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm--when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, ⁴³ then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

Commentary

This passage describes Solomon's dedication of the newly built Temple. He recalled YHWH's promise of rest and a central sanctuary after the conquest of the land. He rejoiced that peace was secured and the temple was built. However, by the time the final editing of this story occurred several hundred years later, both Israel and Judah had been invaded, their leaders exiled, and the Temple destroyed. The people had lost their rest and sanctuary. While the Temple was a house for God, not even the "highest heaven"—much less the no-longer-existing temple—could contain YHWH. In his prayer, Solomon offered several petitions for God's presence, one asking God to hear the foreigner—any non-Israelite. Solomon also recalled God's promise of an everlasting Davidic dynasty. This part of the story is also bothersome since no independent king sat on Israel's throne in the sixth century. Had God reneged? No, but the narrator reminded his exiled audience that God's promise had an unmet condition: faithfulness.

Reflection

What are the two Hebrew verbs that describe God's presence? How did the sixth century editor/narrator of Kings solve the tension between these two notions of God's presence? Why was this important? What was the significance of Solomon asking God to listen to the foreigner? When have you been a "foreigner" pleading for God's presence?

Ephesians 6:10-20

^{6:10} Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Commentary

Ephesians began with a cosmic picture of God's plan that included all believers and a prayer for wisdom, along with a focus on rules for living wisely. Today, we examine a final appeal. Believers are urged to put on God's armor and to stand battle-ready against enemies—not

human foes but quasi-demonic powers or evil forces that dominated the world. Verses 18-20 shift from a call to battle to an appeal to pray for the saints, including the writer who is an ambassador in chains (Paul?). This shift implies that though Paul may be gone, believers are to emulate him by continuing the battle against evil. For many, putting on God's armor to fight evil forces has deep meaning. For others, the war imagery and way of defining evil are problematic. One way to keep unity in a bond of peace (4:3) may lie in restating Ephesians' message in other metaphors.

Reflection

Why are believers to put on God's armor? What are the six pieces of armor, and what do they represent? What was the writer calling his readers to do in their lives, and what are Christians called to do today? How do you ready yourself as a Christian, and for what? What non-war and contemporary metaphors might be used to convey the main message of this passage?

John 6:56-69

⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

⁶¹ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"

⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

⁶⁶ Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Commentary

The bread of heaven is not like the manna eaten by the ancestors—they died; but those who eat bread from heaven receive eternal life. The crowd had complained in response to Jesus' teachings. Now the disciples (the larger group of Jesus' followers) grumbled about eating flesh and drinking blood, saying, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" Jesus challenged their resistance: If this teaching offends you, how will you respond to the ascent of the Son of

Man? With that question, John had placed the offensive teaching of Jesus in context of his whole life. John then left the matter open for readers to decide about the significance of that life—from Incarnation to Crucifixion to Resurrection. Because the followers had not understood the word “flesh,” Jesus offered a new teaching implying that flesh without the spirit dies; Spirit without the flesh denies the Incarnation; but united they create life. In this teaching, John attempted to counteract a growing misperception within late first-century Christianity that the communion elements somehow magically contained the key to eternal life. God offers life, but people always have a choice. Some turned away from following Jesus, and that turning reflects John’s time when some Christians, subject to severe penalties from their synagogues, abandoned their faith. Here, we clearly see the tension between divine initiative and human choice.

Reflection

How does verse 58 conclude the bread of life discussion? What themes are tied together, and what is Jesus’ new teaching? How do John and Paul’s uses of “flesh” differ? Imagine you were with Jesus when he explained this comment on flesh and spirit—would you have been confused or convinced? What does the bread of life discussion in John 6 teach us today about how we present the Gospel?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 84

- ¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
- ² **My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.**
- ³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young, at your altars,
O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.
- ⁴ **Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise. *Selah***
- ⁵ Happy are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
- ⁶ **As they go through the valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.**
- ⁷ They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.
- ⁸ **O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah***

⁹ **Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.**

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

**I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.**

¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favor and honor.

**No good thing does the LORD withhold
from those who walk uprightly.**

¹² **O LORD of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.**

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen