

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 Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15

^{8:4} Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵ and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." ⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the LORD, ⁷ and the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. ⁸ Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. ⁹ Now then, listen to their voice; only--you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." ¹⁰ So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; ¹² and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵ He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day." ¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said "No! but we are determined to have a king over us, ²⁰ so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles."

^{11:14} Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship." ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the LORD, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

Commentary

Last week's young boy Samuel, full of hope and promise, had now become an old man. Eli's two sons had betrayed their priestly office in idolatry and corruption. Now history was repeating itself, and Samuel's sons—like Eli's sons—had likewise stooped to taking bribes and undermining the integrity of the judicial system. The pattern of charismatic leadership of the judges period had decayed to the point where people and their leaders (elders)—looking around them at neighboring nations—were demanding a more centralized system—a monarchy. Citing Samuel's advanced age and corrupt behavior of his sons, they suggested that he was no longer fit to rule and declared that a new leader—this time a king—would solve all their problems. Samuel, reluctant to give up the old, familiar way (and perhaps also his status within it), was displeased by their request; so he turned to God in prayer for advice. God counseled Samuel to accept it, but to caution them of the hazards of a monarchy.

Reflection

How can we discern the pitfalls in what looks on the surface like a promising venture? Why does God allow us to make such mistakes?

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

^{4:13} But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke" --we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

^{5:1} For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Commentary

Apparently, Paul was facing a severe trial—whether a physical ailment or vicious opposition we don't know. But he was not letting this get him down. Even though outwardly the going was tough, inwardly his spiritual life was growing (verse 16). His tribulation was transitory and bearable; he even saw it was a blessing in disguise, since it was helping to equip him for the next life. With the eyes of faith Paul could see beyond the visible and temporal to the invisible to the eternal.

Reflection

When you face trials, does your inner life keep you going, or do discouragement and depression get in the way of your relationship with God? How do you cultivate your spiritual disciplines to cultivate hope in such times?

Mark 3:20-35

^{3:20} And the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." ²³ And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. ²⁸ "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"-- ³⁰ for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit." ³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." ³³ And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Commentary

In verse 21, the phrase "to restrain him" implies that his family was concerned for his physical safety. "Gone out of his mind" indicates that many thought Jesus was crazy because of his teachings and his lifestyle was contrary to the Jesus they knew. The writer's purpose in inserting verses 22-30 at this point is to emphasize that Jesus was not possessed by an evil spirit. Rather, it was God's spirit that was guiding him. The name "Beelzebul" probably refers to the Canaanite God Baal. By casting out "the strong man", Jesus had demonstrated that he had power over the evil one.

Reflection

Jesus argues that evil and good oppose each other and that his exorcisms demonstrate he serves the forces of good. Is it possible to serve good and evil at the same time?

Responsive Reading

Psalm 138

- ^{138:1} I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
- ² **I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;**
for you have exalted your name
and your word above everything.
- ³ **On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul.**
- ⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.
- ⁵ They shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.
- ⁶ For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.
- ⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
**you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.**
- ⁸ The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
**your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.**

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.**