

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.

2 Kings 5:1-14

^{5:1} Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. ² Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴ So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. ⁵ And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. ⁶ He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷ When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." ⁸ But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." ¹¹ But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. ¹³ But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" ¹⁴ So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Commentary

Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army that had made successful raids on Israel earlier (1 Kings 22), inspired respect and fear in enemies and allies alike. Told by an Israelite slave girl

that he could be cured of his leprosy by a prophet in Samaria, Naaman set out for the neighboring nation with an entourage on horseback and in chariots, carrying lavish gifts. He was directed from the royal court to Elisha by the distraught king of Israel. No doubt expecting instant obedience and dutiful homage, Naaman's procession halted at the prophet Elisha's house. Elisha, however, did not even come outside. Instead, he apparently snubbed him, merely sending a messenger to tell Naaman to dismount and to go bathe in the Jordan seven times. Naaman had hoped for a dramatic display of prophetic power on his behalf, complete with shouting, hand-waving, an immediate cure, and was furious at this lack of proper respect. He proclaimed the superiority of Syrian rivers, and left in a huff, uncured. Naaman only received healing when he humbled himself to accept the counsel of his inferiors and follow the prophet's instructions. The picture that Naaman had in mind of how he should be treated threatened to keep him from receiving the gift God offered.

Reflection

How do our expectations of special treatment or proper procedure distance us from others or prevent us from receiving God's gifts?

Galatians 6:1-16

^{6:1} My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. ⁴ All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. ⁵ For all must carry their own loads. ⁶ Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. ⁷ Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁸ If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. ⁹ So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. ¹¹ See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! ¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised--only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! ¹⁶ As for those who will follow this rule--peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Commentary

Paul begins by counseling the Galatians on how to deal with a person who has gone astray in the church, and deals with what the church's responsibility is, and isn't, to these persons.

Paul's reasoning in this passage progresses from the need for mutual support within the Body of Christ, to calling for appropriate humility in one's own conduct, to recognizing that in the end, each is called to personal account, not just by other believers, but by God. Thus, the two ideas compliment rather than contradict each other. The only way we can stand before God is by rigorous self-examination reinforced by loving confrontation by others.

Reflection

"Bear one another's burdens" seems to contradict "all must carry their own loads." How do you put these together in your own life? Is there one that is more important than the other in the church?

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

^{10:1} After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'^{10:16} "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." ¹⁷ The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" ¹⁸ He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹ See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Commentary

When the seventy returned to Jesus, they were jubilant. Joy is the hallmark of the inbreaking reign of God. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth (1:14), like Mary (1:47), like the angels and shepherds (2:10), the returning disciples rejoiced at God's mighty power displayed in their midst.

Reflection

Where is joy erupting in your world?

^{30:1} I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

² **O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.**

³ O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

⁴ Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.

⁵ **For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.**

Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

⁶ **As for me, I said in my prosperity,
"I shall never be moved."**

⁷ By your favor, O LORD,
you had established me as a strong mountain;
**you hid your face;
I was dismayed.**

⁸ To you, O LORD, I cried,
and to the LORD I made supplication:

⁹ **"What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?**

Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?

¹⁰ **Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!
O LORD, be my helper!"**

¹¹ You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,

¹² so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

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.