

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.

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

^{24:34} So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵ The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. ³⁶ And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. ³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; ³⁸ but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.'

^{24:42} "I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! ⁴³ I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," ⁴⁴ and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also" -- let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.' ⁴⁵ "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' ⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹ Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left."

^{24:58} And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." ⁵⁹ So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes." ⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah,

and went his way. ⁶² Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. ⁶³ Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. ⁶⁴ And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Commentary

Today's verses are the heart of a novella in which the promises of the covenant pass from Abraham to his son. They tell how Abraham's servant went back to the "old country" to find a wife for Isaac, and how God worked through this servant to bring Isaac and Rebekah together. Abraham's servant (presumably Eliezer of Genesis 15:2) clearly expected that God would guide him in choosing the right wife for Isaac. Verses 42-49, in which the servant tells Bethuel and Laban what had already happened, indicate this expectation. This servant is a model for disciples because: 1) he worked faithfully to carry out his master's instructions, 2) he became a conduit for God's blessing in the daily life of the family he served, and 3) he was faithful to Abraham even though Isaac received the inheritance rather than himself. How we expect God to work in our daily life is a key issue. Eliezer asked God for guidance in very specific terms, but he also took responsibility for his mission. He did not passively turn everything over to God, but worked alongside God to bring about a happy end.

Reflection

What is God trying to say to us through this text? How would our lives change if we were to take this message seriously?

Romans 7:15-25a

^{7:15} I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

^{25a} Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Commentary

We act contrary to our own best intentions; we try to do right but end up doing wrong. Sometimes we do so in sheer innocence. We may try to do the right thing, but, because we don't have the correct information, or because of circumstances beyond our control, we have the capability of causing hurt and pain in the world. Then Paul says that when he tries to do right and does wrong instead, it is not he who does it, but sin that lives in him. What a great excuse! This sounds almost like determinism. It is as if there is nothing good in him, and evil simply pushes him to do things. We must be careful how we tread through these verses. Paul uses the term *law* to describe the inevitability of losing to temptation and sin. When we want to do good, evil is close at hand. This we all have experienced. Choice means that both good and evil are possibilities, and the two lie close together. This truth is behind the great statement that there is only a fine line between great saints and great sinners.

Reflection

How much does sin constrain your freedom to choose the good way that God intended for your life?

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

^{11:16} "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ¹⁷ 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; ¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." ²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Commentary

John the Baptist was a stern, threatening figure. People would not listen to him because his message was too hard. Jesus came, not threatening anyone, and people rejected him because he's too soft. Like children in the marketplace, they did not want to play either game. Jesus warned them not to turn people away because their message wasn't pleasing—he challenged them to be more discerning. The current national scene suggests that discernment is not one

of our strong suits. It is also true that the bitter struggles in our churches over issues of biblical interpretation and how to apply the Bible to contemporary life suggest that discernment is a much-needed skill. Discernment goes beyond the simple response we often hear in religious rhetoric. Discernment means being open to God's action in and through a variety of groups and understandings—a task that is not always easy.

Reflection

Jesus is saying that the Christian life is both a yoke that is easy to bear, and a life of demands too heavy to bear. Where are you most days as you consider these two realities?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 45:10-17

^{45:10} Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people
and your father's house,

¹¹ and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him;

¹² the people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts, the richest of the
people

¹³ with all kinds of wealth. The princess is decked in her chamber with
gold-woven robes;

¹⁴ in many-colored robes she is led to the king; behind her the virgins, her
companions, follow.

¹⁵ With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the
king.

¹⁶ In the place of ancestors you, O king, shall have sons; you will make
them princes in all the earth.

¹⁷ I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore
the peoples will praise you forever and ever.

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.