

Bible Tuesday for Pentecost III, 2019

I Kings 19:15-21

The Lord said to Elijah, "Go back by the way you came, and on to the wilderness of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael as king of Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king of Israel and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah to succeed you as prophet. Whoever escapes the sword of Hazael shall be slain by Jehu, and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu shall be slain by Elisha. I will leave in Israel only seven thousand—every knee that has not knelt to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him. Elijah set out from there and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah came over to him and threw his mantle over him. He left the oxen and ran after Elijah, saying, "Let me kiss my mother and my father good-bye, and I will follow you." Elijah answered him, "Go back. What have I done to you?!" He turned back from Elijah and took the yoke of oxen and slaughtered them; he boiled their meat with the gear of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and became his attendant.

Elijah has been prophesying against the kings of Israel, the northern kingdom for many years. King Ahab, son of king Omri, was a heretical king, setting up alters to pagan gods all over the kingdom of Israel. Ahab married Queen Jezebel, who brought with her into Israel, hundreds of priests for her pagan religion. Since Elijah preached against Ahab and Jezebel, Jezebel put a price on Elijah's head. Elijah was so exhausted and burned out with battling against the faithless, apostate Israelites and their traitor king and queen, Ahab and Jezebel, that he fled Israel into the wilderness where he hoped he would die. God came to him in the wilderness and gave him three more tasks, which are spelled out in the above passage.

First, Elijah is to anoint the new king of Syria, aka Aram. This is very unusual since Syria was not a Jewish kingdom. Nevertheless, God was blessing Syria and using it to do his will. Next, Elijah was to anoint a new king of Israel, deposing King Ahab. Very risky work since any agent of King Ahab's would surely both tattle to the king and protest, perhaps even murder Elijah. Lastly, Elijah was being allowed to retire and name his successor.

Elijah is so eager to be done with his labors that he does the last task first and anoints his successor. Note the ceremony of naming a successor, Elijah places his outer covering, his mantle, that garment by which he is easily identified, over the shoulders of Elisha. Elisha immediately understands Elijah's action as a call to a new life which starts immediately. Elijah's burnout is evident when he flippantly replies to Elisha's simple request with, "Do whatever. I haven't done a thing to you!" God has selected Elisha, not Elijah.

Elisha sacrifices the pair of oxen and boils the meat in accordance with the rules of Thank Offering. Elijah then invites everyone around to this oxen meat feast, thanking God for this gift of vocation and service to God.

Psalm 16

Protect me, O God, for I seek refuge in You.

I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord, my benefactor; there is none above You."

As to the holy and mighty ones that are in the land, my whole desire concerning them is that those who espouse another god may have many sorrows.

I will have no part of their bloody libations; their names will not pass my lips.

The Lord is my allotted share and portion; You control my fate.

Delightful country has fallen into my lot; lovely indeed is my estate.

I bless the Lord who has guided me; my conscience admonishes me at night.

I am ever mindful of the Lord's presence; He is at my right hand; I shall never be shaken.

So my heart rejoices, my whole being exults, and my body rests secure.

For you will not abandon me to Sheol, or let You faithful one see the Pit.

You will teach me the path of life.

In Your presence is perfect joy; delights are ever in Your right hand.

There are a few words and phrases in the Bible which are rare or not existent in ancient Hebrew writings, and therefore very difficult to translate. The most difficult one to translate in Psalms is "As to the holy and might ones that are in the land." This phrase appears to refer to other gods and goddesses worshiped by the Canaanites. However, as these words appear in no other ancient Hebrew writing, certainty in translation is impossible.

"...my conscience" is literally translated "my kidneys" thought by ancient Israelites to be the seat of thought. This and the following verses list body parts and illustrate the psalmist's whole being involved in faith in God, worship of God, and service to God.

"Perfect joy" – In Hebrew, Shalom. This word means to sit with complete contentment in the presence of God, lacking nothing spiritually, physically, mentally, or emotionally. This is the gift which God alone can give.

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

For Freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh. For these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before, those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These is no law against such things. And those who

belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

In this passage, Paul addresses one of the great conundrums of the Christian faith. "If I am made completely free in Christ Jesus, then why can I not go do whatever I want? God will forgive me; indeed, Christ has already forgiven me on the cross. What is to prevent me from living however I please and still be in eternity with God?"

First, the freedom of which Paul speaks is freedom from the Law of Moses, the laws of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Paul teaches that Jesus fulfilled this Law, and still admonished the faithful to live by its summary: love the Lord God with your whole being and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. This love can only be manifest by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, to answer the above questions, Paul teaches that we are made free from the Law of Moses and from condemnation for our sin in order to love God with our whole selves which we do by loving everyone else as much as we love ourselves.

Martin Luther expounded on this teach of Jesus' and St. Paul's in his The Freedom of a Christian, which is based on Luther's thesis statement: "A Christian is perfectly free Lord of all and subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant to all and subject to all."

Luke 9:51-62

⁵¹When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵²And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" ⁵⁵But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶Then they went on to another village. ⁵⁷As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰But Jesus said to him "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶²Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

"Taken up" – Scholars assume this refers to Jesus' ascension. Before Jesus ascends, he must be crucified. The verb translated as "taken up" appears only once in the New Testament, in this passage and only once in the Hebrew Scriptures, at the taking up of Elijah in the chariot of fire.

"Set his face" – A Hebrew idiom which means to, with great determination and doggedness, head in one direction to accomplish one goal.

John the Baptist is to go “make ready for him”. In this passage, after John’s death, some disciples do the same, given the same title as John the Baptist: “messenger”, or in Greek, angelos, or in English, angel.

Take note, James and John want to flex their new God-powered muscles and call fire down onto inhospitable Samaritans, BUT JESUS REBUKES THEM!!!! How often do we, Christians, act as if our baptism gives us the right to retaliate against those whom we believe to not follow God? Yet here, the one perfect human, the one who will judge “the quick and the dead” neither allows his disciples retribution, nor does he seek it himself.

Then Jesus becomes quite pensive. Jesus is now marching to his death, a death that will be if not inflicted by, at least aided by the very people who now travel with him and swear allegiance to him. Jesus lays out more realistic expectations of what it means to truly be his disciples. James and John were ready to severely punish the Samaritans for rejecting Jesus’ ministry but Jesus rejects their judgment. Instead, Jesus redirects them to judge their own commitment.

“Lord, I will follow you wherever you go!”

“How can you say that when you truly have no idea where I am going or what living my life entails? Before the cock crows three times, you all will desert me.”

“Let me say farewell...” – an echo of Elisha’s response to Elijah’s mantle. While Elijah permits “good bye”, Jesus does not. Jesus is not a prophet. He is Messiah, Christ, Lord, Savior, and has much greater demands placed on him, and on his followers.

“No one who puts his hand to the plow and then entertains second thoughts...” – There is no room for Jesus to second guess God’s mission for him. There is, therefore, no room for second guessing from Jesus’ disciples either.