

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, February 21, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

Does the “devil” exist?

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

Does the “devil” exist? Does “evil” exist and, if it does, from whence does it arise? Are we our “own worst enemies”? IF we are “tempted”, “who” tempts us? Is the “devil” inside us or outside us? Is mankind basically “evil” from birth or “good” from birth? These are important questions if we are to understand the issues of “sin” versus “righteousness” in any kind of meaningful way. I ask that we understand the part that ATTITUDE plays in either scenario. What does scripture “say”? I hope that my words do not come across as angry. I am in the throes of a political campaign for the Republican Primary and my worst enemies are the Republican Party. Every time I turn over a rock, I find a new serpent who does not want to be exposed to the light. No wonder that people do not trust their government...they shouldn't. Is government “demonic” or is it that the “people in government” are demonic? Is it my “perception” or is the world full of “demons”? Is this a “new” phenomenon? Honest and forthright people have always been persecuted. Are people “demons” or are their “actions” demonic? What makes us act the way we act? Again, is the “devil” on the outside or the inside? How do we rid ourselves of our “demons”? How do I “pray for my enemies” when I really don't want them to win? Is it that the “demons” are IN ME? Do we pray for “peace” when what we really want is “total victory” for ourselves? I pray for discernment to learn if I am the problem and they are “right”. Perhaps, “righteousness” is a matter of “attitude” and “gratitude” is also dependent on our “attitude”? I remind myself that the only thing that I control is MY ATTITUDE about my situation, dealings with others and any “problems” that I might encounter. Lord, change my ATTITUDE before I go completely crazy and commit auto-homicide.

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that

time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall CELEBRATE with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

What "jumped out" at you in this passage? I had never noticed the "that the LORD your God will CHOOSE as a DWELLING PLACE for HIS NAME". So, the "place" was "where" God's NAME dwelled? In Bible terms, a "name" is much more than a mere appellation or moniker. A "name" encompasses the very essence of the one "named". Did God dwell there or was it simply where "God's name" dwelled? A building is just a building UNTIL the PEOPLE chose to gather in a particular place IN GOD'S NAME and invoke God's presence. This passage was written prior to the conquest of the Land of Canaan so it was both prophesy and command. It was NOT the institution of the Feast of the First Fruits. This was apparently a one-time event? Notice that it had certain prescribed (pre-written) actions and words that were to be ritualized in order to make the ritual meaningful. Rituals in worship are there to add "meaning" to our worship "time". "Rituals" allow us to focus on the attitude and relationship with God rather than the physical "motions" of the ritual. WE go through the motions but, the "work" is done in our minds. Notice that emphasis is placed on the ATTITUDES of thanksgiving, worship, appreciation for God's PAST protection and an unspoken wish for continued provision of "first fruits". This is similar to "harvest festivals" in many cultures. It can be likened to a "Thank you" note written in response by anyone receiving a "gift" that is appreciated or a wish that is "granted". IF "God loves a cheerful giver", how much more will God appreciate a "cheerful recipient"? This could be a foreshadowing of "tithing" but the "amount" of the gift is not mentioned except that it could be contained in a "basket". Inflexible, legalistic worshippers might ask "How big a basket?" The next few verses, 12-19 describe "how big a basket", a tenth or "tithing" as a suitable offering. But, that is for another day's discussion. The verses (12-19) take the form of a sacred contract between God and his people. Are we "cheating God" by not tithing? Are we breaking a sacred contract? Listen to the "voice of your heart" and yield

NOT to temptation.

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 Page 719, BCP

Qui habitat = "Who dwells"

1

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, *
abides under the shadow of the Almighty.

2

He shall say to the LORD,
"You are my refuge and my stronghold, *
my God in whom I put my trust."

9

Because you have made the LORD your refuge, *
and the Most High your habitation,

10

There shall no evil happen to you, *
neither shall any plague come near your dwelling.

11

For he shall give his angels charge over you, *
to keep you in all your ways.

12

They shall bear you in their hands, *
lest you dash your foot against a stone.

13

You shall tread upon the lion and adder; *
you shall trample the young lion and the serpent under your feet.

14

Because he is bound to me in love,
therefore will I deliver him; *
I will protect him, because he knows my Name.

15

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; *
I am with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and bring him to honor.

16

With long life will I satisfy him, *
and show him my salvation.

The amazing thing about the psalms is that they range from the "get 'em God" type to the "thank you, God" type and the "I'm okay, you're okay" variety. They capture every range of human emotion. They "speak" to us where we are with a voice of reason. This psalm is ALL about attitude. IF we approach God in confidence and place ourselves "under his wing", God will protect and preserve us. This is the source of scripture quoted in the "Temptation of Jesus" passage cited below. I NEEDED to read this psalm today. Do you NEED it today? That

is the power of the Book of Psalms, to meet us where we are so we can be comforted, encouraged and empowered for good. God finds those who seek God because it is the promise we rely upon. The psalmist believes that “evil” exists or he would not have sought protection from it. Does “evil” exist? If not, can you prove it does not “exist”?

Romans 10:8b-13

***"The word is near you,
on your lips and in your heart"***

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Paul's quote is from the "Old Testament" book of Deuteronomy, the "Fifth" book of Moses. It is a "leap of logic" to apply the word "word" to the New Testament word for "Gospel word". Paul steals an "old word", amplifies it and uses it in a "new way" in his logical, reasoned appeal to the Romans and the lesson of "faith". Paul then uses what could be titled "proof-texting" in a positive way. He cites scriptures from Isaiah and, then, the SAME scripture that he cited on the "Day of Pentecost" from the Book of Joel. Did he quote from the "correct versions"? Did he quote it in "King James", "Revised Standard", "New King James" or the "NIV"? Notice that CONFESSION and FAITH are pre-requisites for SALVATION. Hmmm. What happened to "baptism"? Is that what you have been taught or have you been taught "The FIVE steps to Salvation" a la John Wesley's "Method" (Methodist) 5 steps = hear, believe, repent, confess and "be baptized". Did Paul "leave out a few steps" or did he give a complete list? "The devil is in the details"? So, has your mind been cleared? What have we learned that is new to challenge us? Is our understanding complete or do we need further "illumination"? We will "discuss" it on Sunday. Oh, you won't be there? Too bad.

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered

**him, "It is written,
'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"**

**Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,
'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,'**

and

**'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"**

**Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"
When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.**

This "story" of the "Temptation of Jesus" is well-known to most of us. Or, is it? This is no easy passage to digest except on the most superficial plane. When was the last time you stepped back and REALLY looked at it? How about NOW? This report from the "witnesses" who passed it on to Luke immediately follows the story of "the Baptism of Jesus" in Luke's gospel. Note that the SPIRIT LED Jesus into the wilderness to be "tempted". How was it for you when you were a "new Christian"? How long did it take for you to be "tempted by the devil"? Was the temptation "sent" or did it arise from your own MIND? Again, IF the "devil" exists, is the "devil" inside us or outside of us? (Here, I contemplate the old radio show of my youth "The Shadow". It was a staple of the show to ask, "What evil exists in the mind of man? The Shadow KNOWS.) Is that reality or just a "show"? The humanity of Jesus is shown in the tale by his not EATING anything for FORTY DAYS, only water. It is impossible for any human to live without water for 40 days without serious health problems and/or death. We surmise that He ate nothing because "he was famished". When I ran a drug treatment center, it was a dictum of treatment that "temptation" to drink or use drugs was strongest when we were hungry, angry, lonely or tired. Anger was the only lacking element in this tale of Jesus. Is it an allegorical tale or did the "devil" really have a conversation with Jesus? (The existence of a "devil" came into our Western consciousness from the Middle East and its cultures. It was further entrenched in Paradise Lost and Pilgrim's Progress from which we get much of our "theological" themes.) Look up "Gnosticism and the Devil" to further educate yourself about the "theology" of the time this gospel was written. To each temptation by the "devil", Jesus answered by quoting scripture. Is this how we respond to "temptation"? Jesus was tempted in each of the "areas" that may tempt any of us: hunger, glory, fame, power and the thrill of escaping death (immortality). With each temptation, Jesus replied with a scriptural quotation and ended with "IT IS SAID" which indicated that it was not only scripture but an aphorism in common usage among the people of the time? Did this really "happen" just as Luke recorded it? We will never KNOW but we can surmise that it might have happened because it is "within keeping with the character of

Jesus” as shown in his life. Can we “use” this same tactic when faced with temptations in our lives? Have we tried it? Do we KNOW enough scripture to readily quote it in our defense? This could be taken as another good reason to memorize scripture? The scriptures that are quoted are ALL from the “Old Testament” because the “New Testament” was not written until long after the death and resurrection of Jesus. What should WE LEARN from this story? What was Luke trying to record about Jesus? Again, Luke was merely faithfully recording the stories told by those who were participants and witnesses or who had HEARD the stories. Since Jesus was alone in the wilderness, it all revolves around FAITH that Luke recorded it exactly as it was reported. Here’s what I got from reading and thinking about this tale: Jesus knows about the temptations that I face on a daily basis YET He was able to withstand temptation by relying on what He KNEW about God and the ATTITUDE of God. Think about this from the logic standpoint. Jesus KNEW that the Father would forgive Him if he “yielded to temptation”. Do you and I KNOW that God will forgive us? Who is “in charge” of my life, my words and my actions? Yes, I have been given “free will” therefore, I MAKE THE CHOICE. Because I do not want to disappoint my Father, just like Jesus did not want to disappoint HIS FATHER, I respect God more than I respect the “devil” and I TRUST God more than the “devil”. Our children obey US because they love us and respect us. If we yield to “temptation” is it because we do not “respect” and “trust” God as sovereign Lord? Once again, it is OUR ATTITUDE that determines our response and the outcome. When I “yield to temptation”, I disappoint God and myself. I pray for forgiveness and start over. Is this “cheap grace”? I don’t need a preacher, a law enforcement officer or judge to tell me I have “sinned” or disobeyed the law. I know it because my Father has set the standard and His SON has been my example. When I disobey the temporal “laws”, I may face the penalties for my actions but GOD will forgive me if I ask for His forgiveness. Can we “sin” alone in a locked room? Yes, because ALL SIN begins in the mind. We KNOW this from scripture: “As a man THINKS in his HEART, so is he.” The “devil” resides in MY OWN MIND so that I have to be constantly on guard so that I don’t listen and give in to MYSELF and my poor judgment? Again, does the “devil” exist in ME or does the “devil” exist outside of me? The clock is ticking so think fast. It is late and I have a LONG day tomorrow on the campaign trail so, I MUST SLEEP FAST. As Samuel Pepys said, “And so, to bed...”