

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, September 27, 2009

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

“Salty” is Good?

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22

Psalm 124

James 5:13-20

Mark 9:38-50

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22

The king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me-- that is my petition-- and the lives of my people-- that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king." Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?" Esther said, "A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

To get the “big picture”, one must read the entire Book of Esther. “Esther” means “myrtle tree”. The Book of Esther was almost not canonized into Hebrew scripture because God is not mentioned in the text. It POINTS to the presence of God in the life of Esther as a means of saving her people from the political plot

against them engineered by Haman therefore, it made the cut and was included in the Hebrew Bible. The names of the Jewish months as listed on their calendar are not Hebrew names. The names come from their days of captivity. Imagine, every time they call the name of a month on the Jewish calendar, they are reminded of BOTH their captivity and their liberation at the hands of God. The Hebrew Bible is full of stories that begin with the Jews falling away from God, repentance and their eventual restoration through the grace of God. Think of your favorite "Bible story" and see if this is not "true". It is the story of all believing people and nations who fall in and out of love with the Creator. Communion, the central rite of Christian worship, should remind us of the same circle of events in our lives. Over time, we allow God to become peripheral to our lives, lose our way, suffer the consequences of our losses, seek the Lord and are accepted back via his grace provided through our Lord's sacrifice. The Jews' story is our story. There is great hope in Hebrew scripture and there is a means of redemption. No matter how many times we leave the "path" that is "straight and narrow", God is there beckoning us back to himself with open arms. The sad fact is that we seem to take the forgiveness for granted and soon "cool" and fall away despite our prior sorry states. The solution to any problem begins with the identification of the "problem". The sooner we recognize the "fact" that we NEED GOD, the sooner we can take the steps necessary to restore the relationship we NEED with the God who made us. Esther was God's tool of redemption to save the Jewish people from certain annihilation. Esther could be thought of as an "archetype" of Christ? Yes, that is the point. Who knows, perhaps you and I are where we are and who we are to provide a means of salvation to those around us. Think about it and tell me you don't have a personal ministry. You and I are the only "sermon" that many will ever experience.

Psalm 124

1

***If the LORD had not been on our side, *
let Israel now say;***

2

***If the LORD had not been on our side, *
when enemies rose up against us;***

3

***Then would they have swallowed us up alive *
in their fierce anger toward us;***

4

***Then would the waters have overwhelmed us *
and the torrent gone over us;***

5

2

*Then would the raging waters *
have gone right over us.*

6

*Blessed be the LORD! *
he has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.*

7

*We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler; *
the snare is broken, and we have escaped.*

8

**Our help is in the Name of the LORD, *
the maker of heaven and earth.**

This psalm recounts the many times in history that God saved those who were willing to repent and acknowledge His sovereignty over them. Redemption is alive and well to those who would repent and seek the Lord. Each generation seems Hell-bent on repeating the cycle of history. Are we any different than they?

James 5:13-20

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

This is true “holistic” medicine in its basest form. This theory of disease believed that “sickness” arose from the “heart” from the same location as “suffering” and “cheerfulness” for example, ***“As a man THINKS in his HEART, so IS he.”*** Our thoughts can change our appearance. How many times have we said, “You LOOK sad”? How many times have we said, “You LOOK sick”? A lot of Christianity points to our ATTITUDE. We may not be able to change our circumstances but, we can change our ATTITUDE about the circumstances. This last sentence encompasses our motivation for ministry to the “lost”. We are NOT God and can “save” no one. We can however, POINT the way to God, the source of salvation. Our ATTITUDE toward the “lost” will be a major factor in our ability to “lead” them back from “wandering”. Unless our ministry is motivated by

an attitude of LOVE, we exert our efforts in vain.

Mark 9:38-50

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell., And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Again, this passage re-enforces the idea of our ATTITUDE being central to our effectiveness. The "***Whoever is not against us is for us***" was misquoted by George W. Bush and it got him into trouble with many Americans. He misquoted it as "Who is not FOR us is AGAINST us." Words are important as is their order in the sentence. Latin solves this with declensions. English depends on word order and spelling to determine subject, verb, predicative nominatives, indirect objects, direct objects, etc. I am so old that I remember the torture of having to "diagram sentences" on a "black board" in front of my classmates. What I learned under duress, I use every week writing this column. As my "bioscience" professor in medical school admonished, "For now, hold on to what you eschew." His words echo through my mind these forty years later. Thank you, professor. Jesus knew that it was difficult to do anything in His name without having to admit the power of Christ. Was John "jealous" of someone other than the Apostles performing "miracles"? Imagine someone with the temerity to actually "cast out demons in Jesus' name" who was not "part of the club". We attempt to do many things "in Jesus' name". When it is successful we feel great but, when it fails, it is obviously "Jesus' fault". The ATTITUDE of the actor determines the outcome and the fallout of our actions. "***No man can serve two masters***" is a prime example of the division of motives that we often attempt. The WORST thing we can do is to mislead someone with OUR AGENDA rather than the message of HOPE and LOVE and FORGIVENESS espoused by our Lord. The message of Christ is simple in content. WE add the barnacles of "religion" to

confuse and divide people. Despite what we may believe, WE practice “American Christianity” and NOT “New Testament Christianity”. I laugh aloud when I hear that parochial statement. The “salt” in this last sentence is a metaphor for “salvation”. Salt was very important in ancient times because it was used, among myriad other uses, as a food preservative and to pay soldiers. Our word “salary” is derived from “sal” (salt) because Roman soldier’s were “paid in salt” ergo, the statement “they are not worth their SALT”. If salt is not “salty”, what good is it? Have “salt” (salvation) IN YOURSELVES and be at peace. No one is at peace more than those who KNOW that they have been “saved”. One could say that “being salty” is a good thing, despite what you have been told. It all depends on the ATTITUDE of the one being “salty”.