

Proper 9



July 6, 2003

Prayer of the Day

God of glory and love, peace comes from you alone. Send us as peacemakers and witnesses to your kingdom, and fill our hearts with joy in your promises of salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Ezekiel 2:1-5

{1} He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. {2} And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. {3} He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. {4} The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD." {5} Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

This reading is part of the narrative of Ezekiel's vision at the river Chebar when he was called and commissioned as a prophet. The whole call story extends from 1:1 to 3:15.

1. *He said to me*: 1:28 provides the antecedent for the pronoun: "I heard the voice of someone speaking...." "Someone" is Yahweh; see 1:3. "Me" and "you" is the priest Ezekiel, the son of Buzi; also 1:3. Ezekiel means "God strengthens."

mortal: Hebrew: *ben adam*, "son of Adam," "son of man." "In this summons the prophet was not being addressed in the uniqueness of his particular personal being, as would be expressed by his proper name, nor according to his office, but as an individual within the created order, the servant, who is summoned by his master in an act of unprecedented condescension by his divine Lord." [1] "The title 'son of man' by which he is addressed is one frequently employed in this book. But it is found nowhere else in the Old Testament except Dan. 8:17, which is derived from the present passage...that title...expresses...the weakness of the creature to whom the mighty Lord shows such condescension." [2]

2. *a spirit entered into me*: This is a spirit sent by Yahweh which enables Ezekiel to obey Yahweh's command to stand up, and to hear what he says.

3-5: *I am sending you...you shall say to them...they shall know*: Being sent by Yahweh is the *sine qua non* for being a prophet. Ezekiel was sent as a prophet to the people of Israel. They are characterized as "a nation of rebels," transgressors whose descendants are likewise impudent and stubborn.

4. *You shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God"*: The formula introduces the words God would have spoken. The content of the message is not given, but can be imagined from the description of the Israelites as rebellious, impudent, stubborn transgressors.

5. *a prophet has been among them*: See also 33:33.

they are a rebellious house: "The honourable title of 'house of Israel', which Judah had so proudly monopolized after the fall of the Northern kingdom, must now, with bitter mockery, be changed to 'house of rebelliousness'." [3]

Ezekiel is advised that though he is called by Yahweh and sent with a message to the people of Israel, they will almost certainly refuse to hear and accept his message. But

that is not the point. The point is that, in the end, they *shall* know that a prophet has been among them. "This recognition will be incontrovertible and self-authenticating. The opposition, which will almost certainly arise among the people of Israel who are three times described as rebellious, will not be able to hinder the fact of this recognition." [4]

Psalm 123

{1} To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! {2} As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us. {3} Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. {4} Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

1-2: As servants look for mercy to their master or mistress, so the singer looks to Yahweh, the one who is enthroned in the heavens.

3-4: On behalf of the community the singer refers to the contempt and scorn that has been directed toward them, and beseeches Yahweh for mercy.

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

{2} I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. {3} And I know that such a person--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows-- {4} was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. {5} On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. {6} But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, {7} even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. {8} Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, {9} but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. {10} Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

2. *I know a person in Christ*: Paul introduces a revelation which he had fourteen years before. If 2 Corinthians was written about 56 b.c. the vision would have taken place about 42 b.c., several years after his Damascus experience, and about a decade before his first visit to Corinth. "The phrase *in Christ* may simply mean "a Christian"...; or, more probably, it is used to identify this *person* (Paul) as one whose life has been transformed and made new through faith in Christ..." [5]

caught up: "the experience of someone's being lifted up, at least temporarily, to a supramundane realm." [6] The same verb is used for what happened to Philip after he had baptized the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:39). "Paul himself uses the same expression to describe how believers will be taken up into the clouds to meet their Lord when he returns at the last day, 1 Thess. 4:17." [7]

whether in the body or out of the body: "Jewish traditions about the translation of famous people ordinarily presume that they were enraptured *in the body*.... In Greek thought, on the other hand, translation into another realm is almost always a flight of the soul from the body....." [8]

I do not know.... God knows: The manner of the rapture is not important. Only God knows, and Paul does not seem to care.

The third heaven.... (verse 4) Paradise: According to the *Testament of Levi* 2:7-20; 3:1-4, there were three heavenly spheres. In common Jewish/Christian traditions there were seven heavens. Paradise is "usually identified with the place which those who

have been found righteous will inherit as their reward (either at their death or at the final resurrection).... In 2 Enoch 8:1-8[B] and Apoc Moses 37:5; 40:2, *Paradise* is located specifically in "the third heaven...Paul is referring to one and the same experience here." [9]

"I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord."

5. *I will not boast, except of my weaknesses*: See already 11:30

7. *a thorn was given me in the flesh*: Various interpretations include: a) personal anxiety or spiritual torment; b) physical or mental illness; c) persecution.

9. *My grace is sufficient...my power is made perfect in weakness*. This is not only a response to Paul's plea for relief from the thorn in the flesh; it is the principle for God's action in Christ. "...weakness is the hallmark of his apostleship, because he has been commissioned to the service of the gospel through the grace of this Christ—a grace whose power is made present in the cross.... the adversities and afflictions he has had to bear as an apostle—have become a means by which the incomparable power of the God is revealed.... one's only true sufficiency, is by God's grace and in God's power...." [10]

10: "He is not saying that 'weakness is power'.... Nor does Paul mean that he lives in the confidence that the weak will themselves be clothed with power.... He is saying, rather, that the weaknesses which continue to characterize his life as an apostle... represent the effective working of the power of the crucified Christ in his ministry." [11]

Mark 6:1-13

{1} He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. {2} On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! {3} Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. {4} Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." {5} And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. {6} And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. {7} He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. {8} He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; {9} but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. {10} He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. {11} If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." {12} So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. {13} They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

1. *his hometown*: Greek, "his own country." "Like many of the apparent 'geographical' references in the Gospels, this one is intended to signal social rather than geographical information. Jesus is where people know his birth status and honor rating." [12]

2. *they were astounded... 'Where did this man get all this...wisdom...deeds of power...'*: First, the crowd responds positively, but immediately they question his degree of status and honor.

3. *Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of...*: The other Gospels change the description of Jesus as a carpenter to "Joseph's son," Luke 4:22 and John 6:40; "the carpenter's son," Matthew 13:55-56. "The reason, by a *conjunction of context and text*, is that a *tekton* or peasant artisan is but a euphemism for a dispossessed peasant, for a landless laborer." [13] "In asking if Jesus is the craftsman's son, [they]...are questioning how such astounding teaching could come from one born to a manual craftsman.... By Jesus' time such craftsmen were often itinerant.... Like all itinerants who did not stay home to protect their women and family honor, they

were considered persons 'without shame.'" [14] In the mouth of the crowd this, then, is an insult. Jesus' true honor is that he is the Son of God (1:1; 3:11; 15:39).

son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon...his sisters: Mark never mentions Joseph. The mention of Jesus brothers and sisters identifies him with the honor of his family.

4: Jesus offers a proverb as his response. "His riposte is seriously insulting, posing the possibility that outsiders (people not of his village or family) are better able to judge the honor of a prophet than those who know him best." [15]

5-6a: In spite of the retort Jesus was amazed by the unbelief of his neighbors.

7: After teaching in the villages of "his own country," Jesus sent the twelve out in pairs.

authority over the unclean spirits: "Demons (Greek) or unclean spirits (Semitic) were...personified forces that had the power to control human behavior....Jesus' power over demons is essentially a function of his place in the hierarchy of powers, that is, his 'authority'.... He is an agent of God, imbued with God's holy/clean spirit, who overcomes the power of evil." [16] "By giving the twelve power over demons and disease, Jesus moves them up in the hierarchy of powers." [17]

8-II: The "rules of the road" governing what the disciples wore, took with them, and how they were to behave are explicit. They make the disciples dependent on the hospitality and protection of others (believers?). If they are not made welcome, they are to respond with "a great insult, indicating, among other things, total rejection, enmity, an unwillingness to be touched by what others (the town, household) touch. Those of the house of Israel, returning to the homeland after travel in alien territories, shook the dust from their feet." [18]

8. *money:* Greek, *chalkon* = "copper, bronze." [19]

Reflection

Those who accept the call of God and seek to follow him may face indifference and hostility, contempt and scorn, weakness, hardship and persecution, insults and rejection. These are not transient conditions, but are the common situation of those who serve the Crucified One. He rejected the way of glory and found glory in obedience and death.

Those who assume that the followers of Jesus will be respected, honored, and followed; that power and recognition, authority and influence will be their lot will find little comfort in these lessons. Christianity is not a religion for those who seek success or power. Indeed, in the light of the readings for this Sunday, one must question the authenticity of any ministry or servant for whom recognition and power are either sought or acquired.

"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! (Matthew 10:24-25)." Paul was content with weaknesses and hardships for the sake of Christ; we, too, find God's grace sufficient for our needs, for Christ's power dwells in us in our weakness, and in weakness we are truly strong. This is the "cost" of discipleship!

Hymns [20]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

269 --E--Awake, My Soul,
434 --D--The Son of
358 --P--Glories of Your
416 --P--O God of Every

341 --II--Jesus, Still Lead
507 --II--How Firm a
812s/773v, 218, 422, 484

Prayers of the People [21]

God of gods and King of kings; you called and anointed David, you called and blessed Paul, and through your Son Jesus, you called the twelve to follow. In our time you have called us. Enable us to trust you above all voices, beyond all of our prejudices and fears.

Give us courage to follow and serve you among all of our neighbours and with one another in the body of Christ. God of the Kingdom hear our prayer. Bless, O God, the gathering of the Evangelical Lutheran Women of our Church. Give them unity, joy and purpose in worship and service. Bless their life at home and their life together in convention. God of the Kingdom hear our prayer.

Or [22]

Presider or deacon

As we respond to God's call to proclaim the gospel, let us offer prayers for all those in need.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering and for the people of God in every place.

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

For mercy, peace, and justice in the world, and for our nation on its birthday.

For all those suffering from weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

For the sick and the suffering, the poor and the oppressed, prisoners and their families.

For the dying and the dead.

For ourselves, our families, our companions, and all those we love.

Lifting our voices with all creation, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

God of power and weakness, hear the prayers we offer today, and give us strength in our trials; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, p. 131.

[2] Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, p. 61.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 61f.

[4] Zimmerli, *Ibid.*, p. 134.

[5] Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1975, p. 524.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 525.

[7] *Loc. cit.*

[8] *Loc. cit.*

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 526.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 550f.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 551f.

[12] Bruce Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 212.

[13] John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the years immediately after the execution of Jesus*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1999, p. 350.

[14] *Loc. cit.*

[15] *Loc. cit.*

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 182f.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 215.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

[19] “Mark 6:8 states that the disciples are not to take along ‘bronze’ (coins); both Matthew and Luke, probably reflecting a Q tradition variant to Mark, forbid the taking of ‘silver’ (Luke 9:3). Only Matthew reads ‘not gold, nor silver, nor bronze.’ The changes in the tradition likely reflect differences in regional experience as well as the social status of the evangelists: Mark writes from a non-elite perspective; Q reflects views of scribes who regularly handle silver coins; Matthew reflects a community familiar with gold as a banking medium.” K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p.122.

[20] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rc1b9900.txt>

[21] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b2.txt

[22] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>