

(For Monday, September 25, 2017) Will you be called on today to give wise counsel in the face of impatient pride?

“But his [Naaman’s] servants came near and said to him, ‘My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you: will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, ‘Wash and be clean?’” (2Ki.5:13, ESV)

It is clear in this account from Second Kings that Naaman needed to be cured not just from leprosy. He also needed to be cured of his staggering pride. And when that happens, this new humbled Naaman becomes a man of great stature and maturity, now able to function with great effect for his king, freed from the isolation which came from both his physical disease and his emotional defect. But in reading this passage again this year, I was struck by the importance of Naaman’s servants. They could have simply rolled their eyes at their general’s oft-repeated arrogance. But instead, they took a loving concern for this man’s welfare (addressing him with great respect as “My father”), and giving him patient, wise counsel which lead to the happy outcome of this account.

Will you be called on today to offer the same kind of respectful and patient counsel as Naaman’s servants did? (Having been a teenager once in my own life, I can testify that there is certainly the need for it! 😊)

(For Tuesday, September 26, 2017) Have you stopped lately to consider how greatly you are loved?

“In spite of this [all God’s miracles in the desert] they [the Children of Israel] still sinned. Yet he [God] being compassionate atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them.” (Ps.78:32a, 38a, ESV)

The combination of these two half-verses from the Old Testament (the first half of verses 32 and 38 from Psalm 78) completely summarize the New Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s really quite simple: (A) No matter how many times God demonstrated his sovereignty and love for us from heaven or through one of his prophets, our hearts would not be changed; so (B) He would have to come and do something himself so incredible that our rebellious hearts would forever be broken; and (C) this act of wonder performed by God in the first-person would need to include him making atonement for all our sins, since only the perfect sacrifice could actually atone for the sins of all humanity.

Has there ever been any other God in this history of the universe who has demonstrated so great a love for the likes of you and me?

(For Wednesday, September 27, 2017) Are you willing to practice tough love when it’s called for?

“But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality, or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one.” (1 Cor.5:12, ESV)

This is a hard verse to hear. It would seem to be so judgmental in nature. But I’m convinced that what Paul is trying to eradicate with this instruction is a tolerance of hypocrisy that was becoming accepted at the Church in Corinth. It’s especially important to note that, at the beginning of this passage Paul does NOT condemn outright associations with those who have not yet become believers for their sinful behavior. (See 1Cor.5:9) No. It is from within the Church itself that Paul seems determined to eliminate the tolerance of not “practicing what you preach.” Still, the guidance seems somewhat heartless – until you focus on what Paul’s primary goal is. The Apostle specifically says that those who profess the faith in words but repeatedly subvert it in action are to be distanced from you so that such a person, “*may be saved in the day of the Lord.*” (1Cor.5:5)

There are times in this life when we are called upon to distance ourselves from those who are unfaithful to their Christian witness, so that in the ensuing calamity and pain which is the inevitable result of such disobedience, these people might repent and resume a faithful walk with Jesus. No, it’s never easy to practice this kind of “tough love.” But if we really do love the person in question, isn’t this the true course of Christian responsibility?

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(For Thursday, September 28, 2017) What sort of reward are you aiming for?

“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” (Mt.6:2, ESV)

Much has been written about what it means to “sound the trumpet” when the wealthy hypocrites of Jesus’ day made gifts to their house of worship and to their destitute. I believe Jesus created this prosaic imagery so that it would come down to us with individual impact on each reader of God’s Word. We can all do various things to “sound the trumpet,” thus publicizing our acts of charity. The ESV study-note on this verse presents a moment of true human pathos. It reads, “The tragic irony was that they [those who made public their gifts of charity] *had received their reward*; that of public and professional acclaim. But that was all the reward they would ever receive, and such fleeting human adulation precludes satisfaction of the deep longing of people’s hearts to stand approved by *their Father who sees in secret.*”

Have you stopped recently to discern exactly what type of approval and affirmation is driving the important actions and decisions of your own life? Are you seeking the approval of men or of the Creator God?

(For Friday, September 29, 2017) Have you taken full advantage of your power to forgive?

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Mt.6:12)

The theological richness of this verse is astonishing: there are at least three important perspectives here. (1) We pray daily for the forgiveness of our sins. This is not because we stand before God in condemnation for them (For, as Paul clearly says, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* – Rom. 8:1). Rather, we pray daily for forgiveness in order that our relationship with God may not be hindered, by “grieving the Holy Spirit” (See Eph.4:30) through our broken thoughts and actions. (2) We recognize the fact that because Christ paid the ultimate debt we owed to God by “nailing that debt to the Cross” (See Col.2:14), we have a great responsibility to forgive others for their hurtful or unrighteous thoughts and actions against us. (3) This verse of the Lord’s Prayer also goes to the very heart in the power of forgiveness that Jesus so clearly described after Peter’s confession of the Christ. The forgiveness we practice during our mortal life here on earth has a profound effect on our place in the Kingdom of Heaven. (See Mt.16:18-19)

Have you fully explored the power you have been granted through your ability to forgive others?

(Rev. James Barnhill blogs at www.1thes511.net)