

Read Through the Bible

Week 15, April 12 – Apr 18

Readings: 1 Samuel 4-21, Luke 12:35 – Luke 15

Introduction

The passages for this week cover a lot of ground. Our passages begin with the story of the Ark of God. Samuel establishes a monarchy in Israel by anointing Saul then David. The central theme of the books of Samuel is how God exercised his kingship by inaugurating a Davidic dynasty and by electing the holy city of Zion. God's kingship, providential guidance and obedience, His sovereign will and power, along with friendship and loyalty are lived out in the lives of His people. From Israel's battles with the Philistines, the capture of the Ark of the Covenant, the death of Eli, the return of the Ark, Samuel judging of Israel, Israel's requests for a king, Saul being selected as King, defeat of the Ammonites, Lord's rejection of Saul, Saul's demise as King, David's anointing as King, David's defeat of Goliath, David's marriage to Michal, Saul's attempt to kill David, and David's eating of the holy bread. The stories highlight the good and the bad of its characters.

Reflections

By Russ Parker

The passages from this week readings that were laid upon my heart are Luke 14:25-33, the cost of discipleship. More specifically, I found the language in verse 26 very direct and somewhat insensitive. Verse 26 reads, "if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." The language of hate is found in other passages such as Proverbs 13:24 "Whoever spares the rod hates his son but he who loves him is diligent to discipline." We see in 2 Samuel 19:6 "because you love those who hate you and hate those you love you." Again we find this language in Genesis 29:31 "When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren." There are many other verses that could be cited that follow this same pattern. The use of the word hate seems to be used to distinguish clearly that God is to be loved more than anything else, but it not to be taken literally as if we are to hate our family. We are to love our family just as we are to love our neighbor as ourselves; nevertheless, we are to love God more. The first cost of discipleship is that we love our family and our own life less than we love God. Jesus' point is driven home by its offensiveness in a society where honor of parents was one of the highest obligations.

Following Jesus has its consequences. If we are to follow Jesus we must be dedicated to Him and reject self-interest and personal gain or fortune. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be fully committed to Him letting nothing interfere, interrupt, or compete with Him. In verse 27 we find the image of the cross illustrating absolute dedication. In the Gospel of Luke, Luke uses the language of bearing or carrying our own cross metaphorically as

Jesus is made to carry His cross to His execution. It is without one's commitment to hatred of family (loving family less and God unconditionally) and of bearing our cross, that we stumble in being disciples of Jesus. The true cost of discipleship is more than causal or when it feels or when it is convenient. Following Jesus must have priority over all other relationships. "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Not to dwell on the point, but Jesus is not saying that all who follow him must give up all family ties, sever all family relationships, but rather let nothing, not even family, keep one from being a disciple of Jesus. In 1 Timothy 5:8 we find what appears to be contradiction, but is in reality what is expected of us "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Jesus uses hard language to emphasize His point. Focus everything in your life upon Him!

There is no going around it, if you wish to be a disciple of Jesus; you must be ready to love your Lord God with all your heart, mind and soul. We must recognize that love for God, that is to say undivided loyalty to Him, is at the center of faith. The practical way of loving our God is by loving one's neighbor as oneself.