

“Rejoicing in Humble Service”

Text: Romans 13:1-10

He was a man of high position and he suffered from the dread disease of his day. His name was Naaman and he was a commander of the Syrian army. A servant girl suggested to that he go to see Elisha the prophet, who she said would heal him. When he appeared before Elisha he was told to dip seven times in the Jordan River.

He was angered by these instructions because it wasn't the way he wanted to be healed. His servants said to him: “My father, it is a great word from the prophet that he has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, ‘Wash and be clean’?” Naaman obeyed the word of Elisha and he was cleansed with the skin of a little child.

In the meaning of the Fourth Commandment, Martin Luther says: “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.” Our text is one of the classic texts from Scripture that proves that point to us. While obedience is not popular, especially in our world of today, it is given in response to the love of God in Christ Jesus. It understands that God know more than we do and He in His love has provided those who are in authority to provide for us and guide us. Jesus said: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” (John 14:23) God commands and our obedience to them is a blessing for us, as we do this then we see:

REJOCING IN HUMBLE SERVICE

- I. God provides those in authority as a blessing**
- II. God calls us to look out for the welfare of others**

I.

A.1. St. Paul begins: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” There is a double side to that teaching. First, we are to obey those in authority because they are serving God. Secondly, their authority is not self-produced, because it comes for both them and us are to serve God.

When Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked him: “ ‘Do you refuse to speak to me? Don’t you realize I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?’ ” Jesus then answered him: “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” (John 19:10-11)

2. In the various news reports, the people of the affected areas during hurricanes have asked where state and federal help is. They want to know why it didn’t arrive more quickly. I mention this not to make a political statement, but rather to point out that people do see the government as an agency that provides help to people in need. St. Paul warns that rebelling against the government is rebelling against what God has established and therefore against God. In verse 4 Paul states: “For he is God’s servant to do you good.”

B.1. In addition to the care the government provides, it is also an aid to following God in the way that God desires. In the Catechism that is the third use of the Law. By definition it teaches Christians what we should and should not do to lead a God-pleasing life. We are also reminded that the power to live according to the Law comes from the Gospel.

2. When we are obedient servants we don’t fear the policeman sitting by the side of the road with the radar gun.

When we pay our taxes correctly, we generally don't have to fear audits. When we refrain from the abuse of alcohol and drugs, we are saved from jail time and the troubled life that goes along with that behavior. Obedience lessens stress and reduces worry.

One of my professors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis told the story of a young man he had met with. The student and his wife had four children and one on the way. They struggled financially. The professor encouraged him to make use of whatever government help he could. The man was hesitant to do that. The professor pointed out that many Christian people obediently paid their taxes as St. Paul states in our text. His hope was that the government would be of help to this man and his family. The seminarian heeded his advice and was helped with the birth of that fifth child.

The same holds true for those driven from their homes by recent storms. God uses His servant, the government to help and more specifically you and me through our contributions to the cause.

As God gives freely to us we then can make use of the gifts He has given to us. St. Paul concludes the first section of our text by saying: "Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor." In answer to the question whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not, Jesus answered: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Matthew 22:21)

II.

A.1. Several years ago, when I was being installed in a position with the LWML, the man going out of office was to install me with a Bible passage and blessing. The passage he used was this one: "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are

unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” (Luke 17:10)

We should not expect credit for doing what is right. We understand this it is our duty as obedient servants. He has set His commandments for our good. He is saying these are the ways your life is most joyful in the world that I have created. Some see the Law as restrictive. The commandments are summarized by one word-love. That is the point that the Apostle makes in the very last verse of our text.

2. Commandments 4-10 have to do with our relationship with our neighbor. We show respect for one another when we are obedient and serve one another in love. God’s commandments are there to guide us and provide a better life as we relate to one another. In another place St. Paul writes: “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love.” (Galatians 5:13)

B.1. Finally as we strive to be obedient servants, most importantly we have the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus said: “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) This is what Jesus did for us. When we talk about obedience, He gives us the perfect example of obedience. He perfectly fulfilled all God’s commands.

Our obedience cannot save us. The good news is that the perfect obedience of Jesus does. It is God’s gift to us. We know the Law always condemns. Upon more careful examination, following what God desires for us makes us feel good. St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy: “Godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (I Timothy 4:8)

2. St. Paul tells us: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” While we strive to live as obedient servants by submitting to authority and

paying what is required, we can never be paid up in our love for one another.

In the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, times were difficult. Many no longer followed God. There were those who did. God promised them that they would be His treasured possession and He would save them. He told them the distinction would be seen between the righteous and the wicked and those who serve God and those who did not. (Malachi 3:18) God has claimed us as His own. We belong to Him through Jesus Christ. As Jesus served we are also moved to serve and find joy in our obedience for Jesus' sake. Amen.