

The Weekly Word
July 25-31, 2016

Wow, it is the end of July... summer is moving by! Lord, refresh us with relaxation and with Your Word. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, July 25: Numbers 31- War, just war and Jesus' ultimate win...

War is an ugly event; death, casualty, families torn apart, homes, villages and towns destroyed. It is a sad fact of life.

I recently read a book about the US Generals of World War II; Patton, MacArthur and Marshall. These men played an enormous role in the Allies winning the war. The win came with a huge cost in lives and in destruction. War, it seems, always does.

When is it right to go to war and when is it morally wrong? There is no easy answer to this question.

Today we read about the total destruction of the Midianites. In the account recorded by Moses, the Israelites went to war on the orders of the Lord. It was not a human decision but God's. When you have someone like Moses, who is in face to face communication with God, one can know God has decreed the war. War will still be ugly and cost much in human life but any doubt as to morality is settled. The Lord decreed.

In our day we have no such intermediary with God, such as Moses, so decisions about when war is just and justified are much more suggestive. St. Augustine put forth his understanding that Christians could be soldiers of good conscience as long as they maintain proper attitudes and character. Thomas Aquinas later described his Just War Theory.

But since we see through a glass dimly (1Cor 13 NN), decisions about war remain a 'theory.' And Christians to this day are divided on what, if anything, constitutes a 'just war.'

I cannot imagine what it would be like to strike down another human being, especially in the Israel context of hand-to-hand fighting. I shudder at the thought of spearing or 'swording' someone to death.

I readily admit I have lived a sheltered life and my sheltered life is possible because many have given their life and limb so that I can be free and safe. I am grateful for the sacrifices these soldiers have given.

I know, too that someday the Lord will come with His armies to vanquish evil for good. That day will be the bloodiest yet and on that day it will not be nationality that sets the battle lines but faith. Those who love and serve Jesus standing and reigning with the Lord and people who are opposed to the Lord (did not believe in Him) on the other 'losing' side.

Oh, God, in the time remaining before the end... may I be granted courage to advance Your name so that more people come to faith in Jesus and live with You in glory forever. Through Christ, my Lord, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, July 26: Numbers 32- Community First...

In a surprising request some of the Israelites ask to have their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. Understanding that rivers could become a barrier and there was a possibility that

these people were choosing the easy way out - not having to fight alongside everyone else in conquering the land - Moses is at first upset.

Then as things get talked out and the opportunity is fleshed out, Moses lays out an option that provides a winning situation for everyone.

The keystone of the agreement is that the men will cross the Jordan and will fight for all Israel in the conquest to come. In essence Moses says, "We are a community, a family first. Let's put the community first above our individual and personal needs". Everyone agrees.

In my 21st century 'me first' world, I struggle to understand 'community first' thinking. "Does it still hold?" I wonder. Paul's comments about the body in 1Corinthians 12 and 13 tells me that in God's eyes, 'community first' still holds in the church or at least it should.

And this launches an entire line of thinking in me. How might I serve the church? And then on the flip side, in what ways do I hold back myself from my church family? In what ways do I continue to put 'me first' to the detriment of my church family?

Brooding and pondering this carries me in my time with Jesus today.

Lord, what would You have me do to put Your family higher up in my priority list? Are there ways I can give and serve that I am holding back on? Show me, Lord, how to more fully be a part of Your body, to use what You have given me for Your body's sake and to hurt when part of Your body hurts. This I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Wednesday, July 27: Numbers 33- It is good to remember our 'history'...

On the plains of Moab shortly before Israel was to enter the Promised Land, a new chapter in their life, Moses records and reminds the people of their history.

It is good to remember and recount our history. One great time to do this is as you begin a new season of life. New seasons are not always discernable at the start, but when they are, it is a good time to recall where you have come from so you can see where you are going.

Not long ago my church transferred denominations and we took a Sunday to recall the process, which took a long time. We remembered where we came from and looked forward to the adventure the new denomination will open for us.

Personally, I recently went through the exercise of writing my spiritual autobiography. Looking back over my life, I noted ways the Lord was working in my life long before I gave my heart and soul to following Jesus. I also remembered many of the times the Lord orchestrated things in my life. I saw God's activity in the lowest times of life and in my darkest days. It was a powerful experience for me and a great way for the small group I was with to get a brief on my life in Jesus. This spiritual autobiography was much more comprehensive than a standard testimony and the fullness of the story was one of the highlights for me and for the others.

Both my church and I went through a dedicated time of remembering and recording our histories similar to what Moses did in Numbers and Deuteronomy.

I am so glad I did this exercise. It helped confirm and remind me how the Lord has been active in my life in the past... giving me faith that He will continue to do so in the future.

I commend the exercise of recounting your spiritual autobiography... and so live out what God did through Moses on the plains of Moab.

Thank You, Lord, for being there with and for me all of my life, for moving and working and drawing me to You. I love You, Lord, and I offer my life to serve You and Your kingdom until my final earthly breath. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.

If you want to know more about writing your Spiritual autobiography, drop me an email. I found some helpful resources that I can pass on to you.

Thursday, July 28: Numbers 34- Boundaries...

Moses lays out the boundaries of the Land.

My devotional thoughts struggled to find a thought to latch onto, so I sat and stilled my heart. In my stillness the word "boundary" continued to rise in my consciousness.

Boundary. Boundaries...

God established boundaries for the land. And God had laid out boundaries for the faith. I found myself pondering the 10 Commandments... the primary faith boundaries in God's first covenant.

Boundaries protect us. Boundaries mark danger areas. God ordained boundaries help keep followers from much pain and suffering...

Boundaries truly are gifts from God.

Lord, thank You for Your Word, the most comprehensive boundary You have provided. Your word guides my thinking and keeps me within safe bounds. Your word inspires me to live a life of meaning, purpose and faithfulness. Your word inspires me toward love and good deeds. Thank You, Lord God, for Your Word and the safety it offers to my life and all who will listen to it. I thank You and praise You through Jesus, my Lord. Amen.

Friday, July 29: Numbers 35- Truth and cities of refuge...

I am touched by the concept of a city of refuge. Long before the US and other governments talked about due process of law for people charged with a crime, God instituted cities of refuge. *They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that anyone accused of murder may not die before they stand trial before the assembly* (12).

What a statement by the Lord.

God cares for justice, not simply vengeance. Justice suggests that truth comes out and people are judged according to the truth. Cities of refuge were a place where someone charged with murder could run to and find a safe haven until they are tried and the truth could surface. In verse 30, God accentuates the desire for truth, requiring more than one witness to convict someone of murder. *Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.*

Again, truth is essential...

Especially in a world where a close relative could exact vengeance for a crime bound only by an eye for an eye, cities of refuge kept vigilante justice at bay and enabled truth to become the standard for justice.

Life is better when we listen to the Lord. Life is better when it is built on truth.

God, thank You for the gift of cities of refuge. Thank You for caring about truth and restraining human desires to 'get even' or get ahead. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, July 30: Numbers 36- Inheritance & daughters...

Certainly the Old Testament world was patriarchal. However, for its day, God worked into the laws some important fairness for women/daughters as we see in our reading for today.

Daughters who inherit the land are not to lose it to their husband's family. Inheritance stays with the family of origin!

It is certainly not that daughters are on a par with sons, but the family line will not lose its inheritance if there are no male heirs.

I found myself thinking about the Lord and how He is just.

I also found myself thanking God that I am a child of the New Covenant where it removes distinctions, saying there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, etc. The Lord sees the heart, not gender or status or nationality. God sees the heart!

What does God see when He looks at your heart? Does He see one who is committed to Jesus? I pray so...

Lord... my prayer is that You will help me tell others about Jesus so that they can commit their lives to Jesus and be seen by God as a beloved child and heir rather than an outsider and enemy. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, July 31, 2016, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.