

The Weekly Word
September 26- October 2, 2016

This week ends with World Communion Sunday. A day when brothers and sisters will all gather around the Lord's table... the wonder of God's family. And each day this week we get to marvel at the wonder of God's Word. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, September 26: Psalm 124- the Lord is on our side...

I imagine myself marching up the hill toward Jerusalem, throngs of others before, behind and alongside of me. Such would be the sight as pilgrims come to Jerusalem for one of the three mandated pilgrim feasts in Jerusalem. As they climb the hills they sing the songs of ascent. I hear the crowd being spurred by a voice...

If the LORD had not been on our side— let Israel say— (1)

And all the surrounding people crying out in joy

if the LORD had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive when their anger flared against us... (2-3);

Continuing through the Psalm they crescendo with the closing verse (8)

Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

What an amazing chorus of praise. What an encouragement to the soul. What a reminder of God's goodness and greatness!

What a wonderful gift this Psalm is... for my praising of the Lord.

If the LORD had not been on our side...

- The church would not have prevailed in those early days of fear or those decades of persecution.
- Babies might still die on the hills of Greece; gladiatorial fights might still be entertainment in Europe
- The books of the church and western civilization would not have been preserved in the monasteries of Europe.
- The church would not have been steered back to orthodoxy through the likes of Luther and Calvin

If the LORD had not been on my side...

- I might not have completed my MS thesis
- My life might have crumbled when I was laid off in 2001
- Those auto accidents I have been in might have been far worse

But the Lord was my our side and so I rejoice and give praise and honor to the Lord God Almighty...

Our help (my help) is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Tuesday, September 27: Psalm 125- the blessing of trusting in the Lord...

I have a friend who is constantly reminding me to use word-pictures when I speak and communicate. Word-pictures are memorable, especially when they grow out of the experiences of the people with whom you are communicating.

The Psalmist uses an incredible word-picture, particularly considering that songs of ascents were often sung as people were trudging up Mount Zion toward Jerusalem.

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and forevermore (1-2).

I have been to Jerusalem, not as dramatic as say the Rocky Mountains, it is nonetheless an imposing sight when you come from the plains. And the picture says it all.

God will protect us. God will guard us...

Other word-pictures pop into my thoughts.

Those who trust in the Lord are as safe as the gold in Fort Knox.

Those who trust in the Lord are like the President of the US in Air Force One, safe and secure.

As a baby is safe in her mother's arms, so those who trust in the Lord are safe.

I sit with a thankful heart... God is watching over me. I am His and He is mine.

Lord, thank You for this reminder of Your love, protection, and care. I praise You, Lord, and I bless Your name. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, September 28: Psalm 126- When God comes through...

When God comes through for us... those were the first words that erupted in my thoughts as I read this Psalm.

When God comes through as He regularly does... how do I react?

The psalmist cried: *...we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them" (1-2).*

When the Lord comes through... do I shout and laugh? Do I say, "Look at the great things the Lord has done?"

Do you???

Learning to be more expressive in joy (and sorrow) is a learning curve for me. I am quiet and reserved. And though I do not think God is requiring me to change, He might just be asking me to grow more expressive about life and particularly His touch in my life.

Oh, Lord, teach me Your ways. Lead me, show me how to be more expressive in both joy and sorrow, particularly about Your wonderful work in my life during my times of joy and sorrow. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, September 29: Psalm 127- What does it mean for the Lord to build your house?...

The opening lines of this Psalm pierced me. I was attending a board meeting of a Christian ministry. It was the third day and the underlying question of everything we had done so far was, "What does the Lord want us to do about this issue?" This is the context in which I opened and read these words.

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves (1-2).

Naturally these words hit me regarding the work of the board for the last 2 days. But consciously I re-sculpted these words to speak into my life. What must I do to ensure that the Lord is building my life?

I sat with this question....

While a building is an inanimate object, as such it just sits there. I am a living breathing human being... so what must I do to be sculpted by God?

I need to sit with Him. Like a model for an artist, I have to sit with the Lord. I have to allow Him to peer into me with His gaze and then accept whatever work He says needs to be done.

Just last week I went to the dentist... I have to show up and open up and let him work. First the dentist examines my teeth, cleans them so he gets a good look. Then he probes more deeply in problem areas –he knows my history- and potential problem areas. Experience and wisdom tells him where to look for ‘hidden’ cavities. At some point he will ask me if I have noticed anything unusual pain, sensitivity, etc. If ‘yes’. he will probe again those areas. Lastly he gives me my ‘diagnosis’. Sometime this includes the need for cavities to be filled or more extensive work. Most times, thankfully, I get to hear, “all is good.” Sometimes he may add, “Keep up the good work”. Other times he adds tips for better oral hygiene; floss more, clean your gums better, and the like.

I need to adopt a similar pattern with the Lord... to sit with Him so that He can do the same kind of examination and repair as necessary,, my heart, mind, soul and will...

For me the most important and regular aspect in God’s examination is to hold His Word up, to allow it to peer into me and correct, rebuke or encourage. Regular times in God’s Word is an essential for me. Then there is meditation and prayer growing from the Word. Meditation for me is NOT emptying myself of self, but rather filling myself with God through His Word... pondering, chewing, digesting and feeding on His Word, which is truth.

There are also times with other brothers... where we ‘do life’, allowing God to speak through this brother. Weekly worship, regular tithing and giving, prayer with others and service in the name of Jesus.

For me these are my mainstays... for being receptive to the Lord so that HE CAN BUILD MY HOUSE...

Thank You, Lord, for building these features into my life. I want so much to be Yours and to be the kind of man You want me to be... I offer You my life... use me as You will, create me to be what You will and create a clean heart in me that I might not sin against You. I pray in Jesus’ name Amen.

Friday, September 30: Psalm 128- Blessedness is an outcome of an obedient heart ...

Bless me God, Bless me God, this is the prayer of many. People want to be blessed by God. People want to be blessed, period. For many the thinking goes, because I am human or because I am a ‘good’ person (‘good’ being defined by the person themselves), I really deserve to be blessed.

Today’s Psalm, however, offers a different equation. The psalm begins:

Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in obedience to him (1).

From the Psalmist’s prayer we see that blessedness is an outcome of an obedient heart.

Obedience receives the blessing of God...

There was my spiritual nourishment for this morning. Obedience receives the blessing of God.

The natural next step for me as I sat with my Lord this morning was to probe my obedience in light of God's Word... and to listen to the voice of the Spirit as He raises points He wants me to ponder, weigh, change and mature.

Is the Lord speaking to you about your obedience?

Before I closed the book and got up from the lap of the Lord, He whispered some encouragement, noting times and growth in obedience.

God is so good, firm yet gentle, confronting working while encouraging obedience...

Thank You, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit for Your leading, Your love, Your reproofing, Your encouraging. Bless You for inviting me to partner with You in life and the advance of Your Kingdom.

Lord, I surrender to You. Use me as You will. Use me up in Your service. I am forever Yours, a servant in Your household, a soldier in Your army. I pray through Jesus, my Lord. Amen.

Saturday, October 1: Psalm 129- Victory in Jesus...

"They have greatly oppressed me from my youth," let Israel say; "they have greatly oppressed me from my youth, but they have not gained the victory over me (1-2).

I was touched by the final clause of verse 2: *but they have not gained the victory over me.*

Marching to Jerusalem the pilgrims sing this Psalm. Among the praise and adulation of the Lord, this Psalm rings a different tune.

Life doesn't always go the way we hope. Some people seem to think that the blessing of God means a cushy life. This Psalm sings of God's blessing during the tough times of life. Whether brought on by our own sin or the sin of others or some combination of the two, 'stuff happens'. And the pilgrims marching to Jerusalem were not afraid to sing so. But this song is anything but defeatist. 'Stuff happens' but the stuff doesn't have to define us or derail us. Oh, the 'stuff', it might change the direction or trajectory of our life, but 'stuff' doesn't have to ruin our lives.

Again the pilgrims sing, *but they have not gained the victory over me! Halleluiah!!*

Corrie Ten Boom, Joni Eareckson Tada, Chuck Colson, endured and suffered much, but they lived on into the victory of Jesus. The 12 apostles all faced trials and even execution, but they live on into the victory of Jesus.

Walking with Jesus means holding on during the tough days and finding victory, thanks be to Jesus.

I sat and thought about the tough days the Lord has brought me through. Truth is I am a more mature Christ-follower because God showed Himself faithful during those tough times and I am forever grateful to the Lord.

As I live today, the day before the Lord's Day and worship with the saints tomorrow, I am filling my thoughts with reminders that God has always been there and any victory I have gained is thanks to God and God alone.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit... thank You for carrying me when I am tired, weak and hurting. Thank You for consoling me when I am broken. Thank You for breathing life into me when I felt dead inside. Thank You for always being there with and for me. I don't deserve this wonder and love and yet You lavish it upon me. Praise be to You, Lord God. Amen and Amen.

Sunday, October 2, 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.