

**The Weekly Word**  
March 27 – April 2, 2017

With April comes hopes of Spring. As new life buds and blossoms I hope and pray that God's Word brings life to your lives. Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

**Monday, March 27: Luke 17- How do you respond?...**

When God asks something of you, something you are not sure you can do, how do you respond? This was the question God posed to me while reading Luke 17.

The question came through the disciples. Jesus was on a roll, one faith imperative after another. The chapter opens with Jesus center stage speaking to His disciples:

*“Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So watch yourselves.*

*“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them”* (1-4). These comments come after a few chapters of Jesus speaking on a wide range of topics.

It is as if the apostles cannot take any more. Jesus' last directive about forgiveness, repeated forgiveness to anyone who asks, was the last straw. They interrupt and butt in *“Increase our faith!”* (5), they blurt out.

As I recreate the moment in my thoughts, it is as if they throw their hand in the air and yell “Stop” before they ask for faith. They can't take anymore. Their faith is cracking. “We can't do this. What You are asking is too great...”

When Jesus asks something that you feel is too great for you to do... what do you do?

Some of us whine... “Why me?” Some reply to God, “Ask someone else.” This was Moses' first response at the burning bush... ‘God, I can't speak, send someone else...’

Some of us run from God like Jonah.

The apostles cried out for more faith! I was duly impressed and personally challenged. What a great God-honoring request...

Would that this become my ‘go to’ response when God asks things of me I think are too big or too hard or too much to ask of me.

*Oh, God, grow my faith and trust. Grow my maturity and my desire to follow you wholeheartedly. Train me, God, for loyalty and self-less faith. Make me, teach me, Lord, to be so sensitive to the Holy Spirit that I am at Your beck and call. Then, Lord, when I don't think I can do what You ask, show me how to pray with all sincerity.*  
**INCREASE MY FAITH.**

*I pray this in Jesus' name and I pray this so that my life brings honor and glory to You, my God –Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 28: Luke 18- A deep probing...**

*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. After a brief parable about persistence, Jesus concludes: And will not God bring about*

*justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (1,7-8).*

This Jesus-teaching stings mainly because I don't believe that I am very persistent in prayer. I pray about something a couple of times but then I tend to move on.

Does this mean I lack faith? Does my lack of persistence in prayer suggest that I am privileged and therefore do not really need prayer because I can get done what I need without God? Or is my lack of persistence an indicator that the things I was praying for was a desire rather than a true need and I simply changed my mind?

I have more questions than I do answers... and my questions are cutting and exposing.

*Oh, Lord God, if this text is exposing my immaturity or my privileged lifestyle or something else, please show me. Help me to see the sickness in me so that I might go to Dr. Jesus for healing. Help me to see any laziness in me so that I might go to Jesus, my trainer and coach, so that I might grow in faith and perseverance. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, March 29: Luke 19- Each person has a choice...**

Reading Luke's account of Jesus' triumphal entry I recognized a foreshadowing of life at the end of days when Jesus returns to this world as King of kings and Lord of lords.

According to Luke, as Jesus entered Jerusalem *the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"* (37-38).

However, many do not join in this praising of Jesus. At the conclusion of the account Jesus speaks judgment over Jerusalem saying, *"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you"* (42-44).

The sad truth is when Jesus returns people will either receive Him with joy and praise or they will be judged and destroyed. Earlier in this chapter, in the parable of the 10 minas, the newly crowned king punished those who opposed him in the final sentence of that parable. *But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me* (27).

No one likes to think about the punishment that will be handed out at the end when Jesus returns but it is part of the NT. As we say in the Apostles' Creed, "He will come again to judge the living and the dead."

The only way to escape the coming judgment is to be a disciple of Jesus. The praises we offer Jesus now will be amplified as all his disciples praise him at His return and then continually into eternity.

So Jesus places a questions before us. Will we join the 'whole crowd of disciples?'

It's your choice... choose wisely!

*Lord Jesus, I have made my choice. I will follow You. Lead and direct me in Your service. I pray in Your name, Jesus. Amen.*

### Thursday, March 30: Luke 20- Most severely...

Grades of punishment...I don't normally think about eternity having grades of punishment. Separation from God and eternal torment for eternity seems pretty severe no matter how you slice it. Still the closing verses of this chapter seem to indicate a greater punishment for some.

*While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. **These men will be punished most severely**" (45-47).*

Teachers of the law tend to get a pretty strong hit from Jesus. The use of religion for personal gain or personal honor appears to be part of the root of Jesus' concern. These religious men want honor and respect and yet they are taking advantage of people. They are show without substance. They are hypocrites. According to Jesus they **will be punished most severely**.

That is a frightening thought for me on many levels. The obvious level is that there are grades of punishment in eternity... severe and most severe!

But what gets me at a deeper level is that I am a teacher of religion and if I don't watch myself the fate of the teachers of the law could be my fate. Even James, Jesus' brother, writes, *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly* (James 3:1).

These texts shout to me, "Bill, examine your teaching and your life. Is all of you surrendered to Me? Are you teaching and living with integrity and care for My family?"

*Lord, Your call to personal examination is frightening in light of these words of Yours. Punishment at Your hand is unfathomable, but to be punished most severely... I have no words.*

*Examine me and know me, cleanse me at the deepest places that I might not sin against You and I might serve and help Your people. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

### Friday, March 31: Luke 21- Life could get rough, but God is with us...

Eschatology, the study of the end times, is filled with differing opinions and understanding. In this chapter alone, trying to figure out when Jesus is talking about the fall of Jerusalem and when he shifts to the end of the earth before His return is not easy. I sometimes want to shout, "UUGH, I don't understand."

I wonder sometimes if I need to understand. I mean, is it important to figure it all out? The people of Jesus' day and seafarers today don't necessarily understand the science behind weather patterns, but they can read the general patterns.

Red sky at night, sailors delight.

Red sky in the morning sailors take warning.

Ancient Polynesians could tell the presence of a yet unseen island from 100 miles due to slight changes in wave patterns.

My thought, can I understand enough to be able to read the signs???

Can I understand enough to get the big picture?

The big themes I hear from Chapter 21: Life could get rough. I don't know if I am living in the days before the end but if I am, things could get ugly for Christ followers.

- *Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven (10-11).*

- *You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me (16-17).*
- *“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken (25-26).*

No matter how horrible it might get around us and for us God is with us.

- *But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life (18-19).*
- *For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict (15).*

I sit here not really knowing anymore about the end times and Jesus’ return than I did at the start. However, my faith is strengthened because I accept into my heart that God is in control. No matter how hard it gets for me, and around me, God is still with me and in Christ I will win life in the end.

This I believe is the overarching pattern the Lord is showing me this morning.

*Praise be to the Lord... He knows. He is in control. He will win in the end. Death and evil will be defeated and all who stand fast in Him will be saved. We will win when we are ushered into eternity with our God—Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Halleluiah. Amen.*

### **Saturday, April 1: Luke 22- How quickly things can turn...**

Jesus was teaching, crowds were listening, then turn the page and the Passover is celebrated and Jesus is arrested and tried. Just like that things can change.

And things can change within us just like that as well...

During the Passover meal Jesus’ explanation about the cup being poured out for them is barely off His lips when He announces that someone at the table will betray Him. At that the disciples *began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this (23).* You can almost hear the conversation switch as a chorus of “not me” breaks out among the twelve. How quickly the situation can turn...

But the disciples aren’t done. Their chorus of “not me’s” flips on its head into a braggadocios display of who is the best among them. So heated became the bragging that Luke calls it a dispute. *A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest (24).*

These soon-to-be pillars of the faith dissolve into a petty argument about who is the greatest. What a disappointing moment.

How quickly we can turn from the important to the inane.

How quickly we can go from the sacred to the secular.

How quickly we can dissolve into selfishness to protect self or honor or ...

Sadly, in the disciples I see myself and how quickly I can devolve into pettiness!

*Oh, God, teach me how to control my sin-filled nature. Give me victory over selfishness and pride, over needing to be best and destroying others—in thought, word or deed—in order to ‘maintain’ my reputation.*

*Oh, God, make me to be more like the disciples post-Pentecost rather than pre-Crucifixion. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

### **Sunday, April 2, 2017, 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](mailto:office@pcogonline.org).*

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