

## The Weekly Word

April 3-9, 2017

Spring has sprung, I hope. May God spring into your life through His Word. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

### **Monday, April 3: Luke 23- To save me and you and all who believe...**

Jesus died so that I could be forgiven and redeemed.

Jesus paid my penalty and the penalty for everyone who believes.

To say that Jesus is merely a wonderful teacher is to miss the significance of the end of the Gospels. Jesus came to pay the price we humans could never pay.

To say Jesus is merely a great teacher is to miss the end of the Gospels... His death and eventually His resurrection.

Today I made it a point not to miss the climax of Jesus' story... His death on the cross. Something He predicted. Jesus is not a victim; He is God's agent of atonement and salvation...

*Thank You, Jesus... thank You. Amen.*

### **Tuesday, April 4: Luke 24- God keeps his promise...**

Jesus not only predicted His death; astonishingly He predicted His resurrection and the two events are intrinsically linked. If there was no resurrection then His death would have been in vain. He would have become just another big mouth who was silenced by death.

When the women came to the tomb, they met two men who told them, *He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again'* " (6-7).

At this they remembered what Jesus had taught them. On two separate occasions Luke 9:22-27 and 18:31-33 Jesus told His people that He would rise again. His resurrection is His vindication. It is the truth indicator of what He taught. If this is real then all He taught is real. If this is not real then could anything He taught be trusted?

And His resurrection prediction was not a secret only His disciples knew. Matthew records that the Jewish leaders all knew what Jesus was teaching about His rising from the dead. *The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."* "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard (Matthew 27:62-66).

With His death and resurrection, God has bridged the gap between human sin and invited people to believe in Jesus.

Do you believe?

I do and this chapter brings life into my heart, mind and soul.

*Oh, Lord Jesus, I praise and thank You. You walked that lonely road to Calvary and the grave to prove the point that You are Messiah, God's redeeming Son. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You.  
In Your name I pray. Halleluiah. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, April 5: Galatians 1- What's your journey in Christ been like?...**

Paul provides a brief picture of his early years in Christ... time in Arabia, then Damascus. Then he took a two-week trip to Jerusalem to check in with Peter and James. His early years were spent with the Lord. I wonder what that time was like? From the book of Acts I know about his time on the Damascus Road and Ananias praying for him (Acts 9). Then his later travels planting churches.

Reading Paul's story caused me to ponder mine. We all have a story. And for believers in Jesus our story includes how God brought us to faith in Jesus.

As part of an elder leadership process my church elders and I are completing each of us had to write a spiritual autobiography. Writing my spiritual autobiography took some pondering thought, walking through my life from earliest remembrances to the present day. It included my coming to faith in Jesus but so much more. When I put mine together I chose to write about my early years, my time of conversion and my journey following God's leading as I grew in my faith in Jesus.

It was a wonderful exercise, I heartily recommend everyone take the time to think through and write out their spiritual autobiography. There were so many places and times that God spoke into my life leading me to my moment of conversion. Then there were many more times after my conversion leading me to where I am today. It is so easy to forget all that God has done; and if not forgotten I easily push them to the side. By taking the time to recall my life and to see the many God-sightings throughout my life was wonderful, encouraging and life giving.

As part of our elder process we each told our spiritual autobiography to the elders at a meeting taking between 20 and 30 minutes each. The months that we told our stories I was touched by every story. God worked with each of us in different yet profound ways through ups and downs, in times of faithfulness and sin.

It was wonderful to hear God's story in ours. Hearing Paul this morning brought back many of my own encounters with the Lord.

If you haven't ever taken the time to pondered how you came to faith, then I encourage you to take some time over the next few days to do so...

*Thank You, Lord, for my story. For the ways you worked in my life from the moment of my conception till you brought me to faith in Jesus. Thank You, Lord, for the ways You continually work in my life to bring about Your will. I rest in You. Halleluiah. Amen.*

PS: In a separate additional post, I will share with you the guidance I received about writing a spiritual autobiography.

### **Wednesday, April 5: How To Write a Spiritual Autobiography**

*\*Adapted from "Spiritual Autobiography" by Richard Peace (pgs. 65-78)*

#### **Step One: Pray- invite God into your reflection and writing time**

## **Step Two: Divide your life into periods**

Age-based or Search-based periods of time.

- When reflecting on your journey of faith and your life, you may choose which option best fits for your story. Read both options before you begin to sketch out your life for your spiritual autobiography.

### **Age- Based Periods**

- Childhood- from birth until adolescence a person is dependent on their parents and finds their primary identity as a member of a family rather than an individual. For some childhood is carefree and tranquil and for others it can be filled with stress and pain. Many of our primary views of God come from this period.
- Adolescence- The adolescent's goal is to begin to break free from their family and begin to develop an independent identity which can involve turmoil. This period is frequently a time of openness to God.
- Adulthood- The rest of life as we figure out who we are as adults, in relation to the work world, in relation to others and in relation to God. This can be broken up into stages if it is helpful: Young adulthood, thirties, mid-life, fifties, retirement. Each stage is very different and leads us to different spiritual questions.

OR

### **Search-Based Periods**

Think of your life as different periods that represent the various phases of your search for God. All of the below phases do not occur for everyone. Each search for God is so unique. If you grew up in the church, then neither quest or commitment might apply, mostly incorporation. For others, the central phase is commitment. They knew about God for years, but spent time running away from Him or avoiding Him. For some, they spent the bulk of their time in the quest, then commitment and incorporation came more easily. These categories are meant to give you a flexible framework to write your story.

#### 1. Quest/Searching Phase- What Direction is your life pointed?

- Towards God or away from God? The shift from one direction to the other (whether sudden or gradual is worth noting). In this phase you might have: believed there was no God, wondered if there was a God, function as if God isn't involved, believing in God but paying little attention to Him, actively fleeing God, actively seeking things not of God, searching for answers, etc.
- Good questions to ask yourself to reflect on this phase are: What was the nature of your search for God? What started you on your search for God? Who or what aided you? Who or what slowed your search? What kept you moving forward? What were the key events? Key people? Key insights and questions? Key experiences?

#### 2. Commitment Phase- When you came to know God

- America is a religious nation where it seems that the majority of people believe in God, but studies show that our beliefs do not usually go very deep. Even those who profess to believe do not know much about God, nor does their life look very different than someone who does not believe. The issue of commitment is a real one and often marks the beginning of a new phase of our spiritual life.
- Commitment is not usually a single event that happens all at once. Often starts with commitment to Christian ideas and morals. Believing that things are true and living out these beliefs are two different things. Moving from belief to action is an important step in commitment.
- Commitment to church and commitment to Christ. For some people the commitment to church comes first and leads them into a commitment to a relationship with Christ. For others commitment to Christ precedes commitment to church. Which one describes you?
- Conversion is another form of commitment (dramatic or gradual) whereby you enter into a conscious relationship with Jesus in trust and obedience. Conversion means a new awareness of Jesus, your need for Him and an attempt to follow Him.
- Commitment to Jesus generally is the event that precedes the Incorporation phase. What did this phase look like for you?

### 3. Incorporation Phase- when you live out your commitment to God

- We never move beyond this phase. We spend our whole lives learning to be consistent disciples of Jesus.
- In this phase, we journey through various phases of cooperation and growth with the Holy Spirit, we make mistakes, we experience desert seasons where God seems absent or far, we learn to love better, we try different spiritual disciplines & different churches to help us develop our spiritual maturity, and where we draw closer to Jesus and grow in our likeness of Him.
- What has it looked like for you to grow as a disciple of Christ?

### Step Three: Examine Each period

- Once you have divided your life into periods that make sense for you, reflect on each period and look for material related to your spiritual autobiography.
- It might be helpful to look for these 3 things
  - A. *Encounters with God*- times when the presence of God was especially vivid or challenging. Try to answer the question: how has God made himself known to me in each period of my life? Reflect on all the ways you have encountered God.
  - B. *Crises of Faith*- crises stimulate growth, even though we don't like them. Crises force us to rely upon God. There are at least 5 different types of crises: crisis of doubt, crisis of

circumstances, crises of disobedience, crisis of depression, crisis of darkness/evil. Identify your points of crises and look for God's presence at those points.

- C. *Outcomes of Growth*- as you look at the events/people/circumstances in each period and try to notice where God was, also ask yourself "how did I grow more into the image of Christ during that time?" Growth is not a straight line of progress for any of us- there will be many ups and downs. Here are some types of growth to consider: intellectual growth (what we think shapes who we are), emotional growth (what we feel shapes who we are), behavioral growth (our actions reflect what we think/feel) & relational growth

#### **Step Four: Write your Spiritual Autobiography**

- Based on the notes you have written in Step One and Two, you are ready to put it all together and write your story.
- Depending on how much brainstorming you have done and how much material you have, you may need to prayerfully review your notes and decide which parts of your story are key to your spiritual journey. You most likely will need to edit out some content to get your story to 20 minutes.
- **Remember that a Spiritual autobiography focuses on where you were in relation to God in each phase of your life.** Your stories will be at the heart of your spiritual autobiography: stories of where you have come from, where you are now and where God is leading you.
- To help you keep your focus, read through what you have written about each period and ask yourself the question: **Where is God in my life during this period?** If an answer to this question is clear then you have produced a good spiritual autobiography.

This material is from the Elder Leadership Institute, an elder training program from my denomination, ECO, A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. I used the 'Age-based Period' option when I wrote my spiritual autobiography.

#### **Thursday, April 6: Galatians 2- Only one way...**

*We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified (15-16).*

There is only one path to freedom, one way of salvation, our faith in Jesus Christ.

There is no way a human being can merit her or his way into God's good graces. There is nothing we can do, no human pietism that will cause us to be justified before God except faith in Jesus Christ.

It does not matter what our beginnings Jew or Gentile, male or female, northern hemisphere or southern hemisphere, Asian, African, European, American, or Australian, Caucasian, Black, Latino, Asian or mixed, only simple faith in Jesus –no extras needed –brings justification before the righteous and pure God, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

There are times when every person must ask her or himself... is your faith in Jesus, the one thing that gives you hope of right standing before God?

Think about it.

I know I am...

*Lord, let me not corrupt perfect faith in Jesus with any sense that something I have done, am doing or will do enhances my 'chances' before You. Instead give me strength to cling to Jesus and faith in Jesus alone for my justification and salvation. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

### **Friday, April 7: Galatians 3- Importance and power of the Holy Spirit...**

Paul poses two questions that he aims at people who are returning to dependence on the law rather than faith in Christ. These questions, it seems to me, also challenge rule driven, ritualistic lifeless Christianity. Paul writes:

*I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? (2)*

*So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (5)*

I wonder how many Christians can even make sense of these questions.

Is the 'receiving of the Holy Spirit' a part of your Christian faith?

Clearly Paul is speaking about some 'happening' in the person's life to which they can point. This receiving of the Spirit seems to be more than a momentary happening –whatever that maybe. The second sentence liken the 'giving of the spirit' to 'miracles among you.'

Paul's understanding of Christianity is far more robust and life changing than many (most) of us experience.

I am wondering this morning... what gives? Why does much of Christianity today seem devoid of the touch by the finger and works of God than it was in Paul's day?

The difference has to be more than mere theology. Are we so comfortable today in life and in our cultures that we don't need God's touch or miracles to live?

Are we so unimpressive in our witness for Jesus that He doesn't need to show Himself through miracles?

So God has me wondering about powerless Christianity and our lack of need for God's miraculous workings...

*Oh, Lord, I pray for a desire to know You in Your fullness. Increase my need for You. Increase my witness for You. Increase my desire to see You work in and through me in ways that defy mere human wisdom or skill. Increase my desire to depend on Your touch, Your works, Your miracles. I love You, Lord God, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Saturday, April 8: Galatians 4- Children of promise...**

*Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise (28).*

What a rich image. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are children of promise. Paul uses the analogy of Esau and Isaac, with Isaac being the child of promise. Esau was a 'natural child' born of Abraham and Hagar. However, Isaac was a miracle baby, born of Abraham and Sarah both of whom were old (100 and 90 respectively). Sarah, as you can understand, was well past child bearing age and yet God allowed them to conceive. Isaac was the fruit of their union.

Isaac was also the son promised to Abraham through whom God would make a great people, which God did! Isaac was the son through whom God's promise was realized; hence he is the 'son of promise.'

The wonder of this passage is that Paul equates us –Gentiles believers –as children of promise. God will use us to fulfill His promise to make disciples in every tribe and language and nation and people. We, as 'children of promise', are heirs to God's kingdom and kingdom blessings.

As children of the King we have a responsibility, too, to live as children of the King and 'keepers and spreaders' of the blessings of God to the world. We are not 'children of promise' for our own sake... we are 'children of promise' to bless the world by our presence, witness and manner of living!

God's still small voice whispers... "Rise up and live into your promise. Seek Me, the promise keeper, and be about my bidding..."

Hmmm... a challenge for today and all the remaining todays the Lord gives me this side of eternity.

*Lord God, giver of promise and blessing, I pray for strength and wisdom to live for You today. And in so doing honoring Your promises which You lavishly and graciously gave to me. Thank You and bless You. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

## **Sunday, April 9, 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.