

The Weekly Word

April 17-23, 2017

Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's... Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, April 17: 1Samuel 5- The Lord is real and he is alive...

The Ark was not magical, but it was filled with the presence of the Lord. When the Lord wants to manifest His presence, He can and will.

God was not going to be manipulated by Israel, especially since sin was the root cause of Israel's defeat (yesterday's chapter) but the Lord chose to prove Himself before a pagan god.

The Lord's desire is that His name is revered by all people. The Philistines may not have worshipped the Lord but they certainly revered His presence and power!

After chewing on all this I switched from then to now.

Do I revere the Lord? How have I seen the Lord show Himself in presence and power?

I have not seen grand miracles on the scale of what I read in the Bible... but I believe them. The greatest miracle of all is the resurrection of Jesus, which we celebrated yesterday. Jesus has touched my life in too many ways for me to include here but as I sit, acts and blessings of God flash through my memory.

The Lord is real and I would stake my life on that!

His presence at times is palpable. I have felt His presence during worship and at countless other times. This morning I woke up singing His praises. The Lord God had been with me all night.

The Lord is real and I would stake my life on that! Halleluiah!

Jesus Christ is risen today (and tomorrow and the next day...) Alleluia! Amen.

Tuesday, April 18: 1Samuel 6- One God...

There is no confusion, no possibility of happenstance or mere 'chance' that the Ark made it back to Israel on its 'own.' The text is absolutely clear God brought the Ark home. All Philistia knew that and still they refused to believe.

I was surprised to read that Philistia knew the exploits of the Lord that brought Israel out of Egypt. *The Philistines asked, "What guilt offering should we send to him?" They replied, "Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and give glory to Israel's god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land. Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When Israel's god dealt harshly with them, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way? (4-6 bold mine).*

The Philistines hold no reverence for the Lord as their God or the true God, but they did know the miraculous story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt by the Lord. I wondered how this could be, then I realized only a people with monotheistic beliefs would be concerned about a true God or one true God. Others in the world, like Philistines, had many gods and what mattered was 'if my god was stronger than your god'.

I accept the Israelite notion that there is only one God who created heaven and earth... all that is and will be. I believe this God existed before time and matter. I believe in the God presented in the Scriptures. I believe in the Father, Jesus, the only Son and the Holy Spirit –the Trinity –one God in 3 persons.

I believe... do you?

I believe and so I bow before God. I worship and surrender my life to serve the living and true God for all of my days.

Praise be to You, Lord God Almighty, the one God I will worship, adore and follow. To You be honor and glory. To You be all praise. To You alone... May my life bring You honor and glory. Amen and amen.

Wednesday, April 19: 1Samuel 7- Sheep need a shepherd...

Like sheep, Israel was prone to wander from the Lord. A neighbor's god seems to bless them and so Israel turns to the neighbor's god. A neighboring people finds success so Israel tries out the country's god. Over time Israel is worshipping this god and that god and maybe the Lord alongside of those other gods.

When the Lord returns the Ark, *Israel turned back to the Lord. So Samuel said to all the Israelites, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."* So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only (2b-4).

Samuel understood that fidelity to the Lord was the foundation for the nation. The Lord was their strength, their protection, their wisdom, their everything. When Israel trusted the Lord they prospered. When they followed the Lord's direction they prospered. When they went their own way and adopted other gods they faulted.

Over and over again God welcomes them back when they repent.

As I considered this chapter I realized Israel's story is my story. I, too, drift from the Lord. It is not so much that I out and out turn my back on the Lord, but I drift. I start to trust my intuition rather than rely of the Lord and His wisdom. Then God gets my attention and as soon as I turn back to Him He welcomes me and calls me to deeper fidelity.

Samuel knows that fidelity to the Lord is the KEY ingredient for a faithful Israel so at the first sign of returning to the Lord he declares what they all need to do.

Samuel's role causes me to ask, "Who speaks truth into my life... into your life?"

Sheep need a shepherd. We all need someone who can speak truth into our lives, like Samuel did for Israel.

Oh, Lord, continue to provide voices who can speak Your truth into my life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, April 20: 1Samuel 8- to be like everyone else...

Samuel was a great leader. He listened to the Lord and did as the Lord bid. *But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice* (3). So the people begged Samuel to anoint a king. Samuel went to the Lord and the Lord told Samuel it was not Samuel they rejected but the Lord as Israel begged for an earthly king (7).

God did not seem phased that Samuel's sons weren't following Him. I wonder if the Lord had a plan for future leadership about which we will never know.

Whatever God would have done, the people wanted a king to be like all the other nations (see 5 and 20). This truly was a rejection of the Lord and a desire to be like everyone else.

Isn't that what we still want to this day... to be like everyone else?

I want a house like everyone else and a car like everyone else and a computer like everyone else and a... fill in the blank.

It is not that these things are bad, but is it what the Lord wants for me, that is the question.

Maybe I should probe our (my) desires from the opposite direction. Does the Lord want me to have a house, car, computer, etc.?

God's desires for us and not what others will think, should be my (your) motivation.

This thought bites... I suspect that I am motivated by what others think more than I want to admit!

Oh, Lord, I don't even know how to speak right now. I feel conviction settling upon me.

Forgive me where I have erred and show me the correct way. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, April 21: 1Samuel 9- In the midst of life...

This historical sliver of Israel's history didn't carry any big God-moment as I was reading. No verse leapt off the page to my heart. It seemed like any historical narrative I could read in any number of books.

But then almost as soon as I finished the chapter a spark hit me... in the midst of life, God shows up!

I found myself quietly saying, "Yes." Yes, that is how the Lord often works. In the midst of life, a nudge, a thought, a Scripture, a song, a conversation happens and God uses it to direct me.

The Lord doesn't need extraordinary moments to lead and guide. God doesn't wait only for special days or moments, God is around me. He is with me all the time and in everyday moments He is speaking and guiding.

Am I listening?

Saul could have begged off his servant's suggestion but something told him to listen and his life was forever changed because he stopped to see Samuel. It is apparent that Saul doesn't even know who Samuel is!

Here's my challenge growing from my time with the Lord in Samuel 9. Will I keep my eyes and ears open to the Lord's direction today? In all likelihood it won't be as life altering as Saul's but then again it could be. Will I be listening for the Lord's voice, His nudge, His direction today and will I do this every day?

It doesn't seem like Saul was necessarily listening for God, so God broke in. As a Christ-follower I have God, the Holy Spirit, in me and with me. I can do better than Saul. I can be attentive to the Spirit directing me in the midst of life.

Oh, God, I am so blessed that You are a God who speaks, a God who directs and leads and cares and loves. I praise You, Lord, and I ask You to train me in understanding and discerning Your voice when You call... in every way You choose to communicate with me. I love You, Lord. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, April 22: 1Samuel 10- Sad day in Israel...

One would think that the anointing of a king would be a great and wonderful day. But not so for Israel. The anointing of Saul as king was a dark day. The people may not have realized it, but God made it clear to them. *Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the LORD at Mizpah and said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.' But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your disasters and calamities. And you*

have said, 'No, appoint a king over us.' So now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and clans." (17-19).

The Lord gave them what they wanted, but sadly what they wanted was not God's best.

This got me thinking about my prayers. Do I ever beg God for what I want, without asking the deeper question, 'Is this what the Lord wants?' Oh, the heartaches that come when we beg God for things that are not His best for us.

I have heard some people talk about God's permissive will verses His perfect will. This is certainly an example of permissive vs best will. Hezekiah's extra 15 years may be another example. After all, Manasseh was 12 when Hezekiah died and he became king. This means Manasseh, one of the worst kings in Israel's history, would never have been born if Hezekiah's life wasn't extended by the Lord.

As much as I may want something at a particular moment, I do not want my will or desire to ever take precedence over the Lord's good and perfect will for my life. For this to be true I must continually surrender my will to the Lord's will, something Israel was never truly able to do.

Oh, God, I pray for the strong presence of Your Holy Spirit in me. Teach me, Lord, to listen and OBEY the Spirit's leading always. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Sunday, April 23, 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.

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