

The Weekly Word
April 24-30, 2017

May the glory of the Resurrection continue to be with you. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, April 24: 1Samuel 11- Who is your leader, who is your Savior?...

A subtle shift has occurred in Israel since the days of conquest. As they moved from Egypt to the Promised Land, God's anointed led the people. Moses and Joshua were very careful not to take credit as leader themselves but to constantly point to the Lord. In fact Moses didn't enter the Promised Land because in a moment of frustration he said, "Must I bring water from this rock for you?" The Lord did not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land because of the transgression.

Then come the judges, men and a woman, who led for a time, sometimes a significant length of time, but there was no family lineage. And many judges rose up in a time of need and then disappeared after God used the judge to deliver Israel.

Next came Eli and Samuel; more like Moses they were prophets who heard from God and reported the things of God to the people. They didn't lead battles or 'reign' in any way.

Now comes Saul... as king. Today's reading is on the threshold of Saul being confirmed king for the second time.

The subtle shift is that he will lead. Ideally God will lead Saul. With Moses and Joshua the Lord directed them and then they directed the people. The king, however, assumes leadership and hopefully he is listening to the Lord.

The shift is subtle but real.

And the shift challenged me to probe my own life... am I living my life in the model of:

- Moses... listen for the Lord's leading and then act accordingly, or
- Saul... act on your own leading, 'assuming' you are in tune with the Lord?

This is a difficult question because it probes dark recesses of my life. It causes me to ask penetrating and difficult questions of myself...

Am I my own leader and savior, or am I following after the Lord?

Lord God, keep probing me and don't let me off the hook easily giving trite or stock answers. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, April 25: 1Samuel 12- Integrity...

Samuel's final testimony grabbed me. He has led Israel for years and as he prepares to step aside so that Israel's first king can take over, he calls people to evaluate his integrity.

"I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right" (1-3).

Samuel's comments launched me into self-reflection. When life is ebbing and the sunset of my life is cresting will I have lived my life in such a manner that I could stand before family, friends, coworkers, bosses, subordinates, and neighbors and say, "Testify today have I cheated, wronged, hurt or taken advantage of you in any way. If so say so, that I may make it right with you right now."

The deeper question I am wrestling with today is how must I live to be able to make that kind of a statement in the future? Are there things I need to change and correct in the way I am living today so that I am in a better position to be able to say those things in the future?

Lord, I have much to learn and many areas of growth needed. Guide me into deeper and more faith-filled following. I pray in Jesus, my Lord's name. Amen.

Wednesday, April 26: 1Samuel 13- Choices...

We face choices every day and all day long. Choices move and determine life. Some of our choices are wise, some not so much. Some choices are big and others little.

Saul made a HUGE foolish choice.

Saul was losing the heart of his men who were growing impatient, so he acted. While decisive action is the mark of a leader; the choice a leader makes also reveals her or his character. Saul chose to cross a faith line. He disregarded the Lord's command and offered unauthorized sacrifice. In his day this was a significant breach of faith. Saul sought to appease God rather than listen to the Lord.

One lesson of the Old Testament is "*To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams*" (1Sam 15:22)

As I ponder this episode from Saul's life I am wondering about my own living. Is it my instinct to obey the Lord or attempt to appease Him by acts of sacrifice... giving money, serving others, etc., that drives my actions? I realize that giving money and serving others are good things, so was animal sacrifice in the OT, but why am I doing these things? Am I trying to buy God's love and care or am I doing them because I know they reflect the heart of a Christ-follower?

I realize there is a fine line of motivation that differentiates these two similar actions. As I ponder my inner world of motivation, I am realizing it is not always apparent what my motivation truly is and, yet, this quest is spiritually healthy. It is part of a life lived openly and honestly before the Lord.

Lord, I lay before You my inner self; my hurts and wounds, my inner motivations, my mixed-bag of faithfulness and faithlessness. Help me parse my inner life so that I can discard sin in its various forms. Use Your Word and my time in it to divide joints and marrow, to help me grow in You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, April 27: 1Samuel 14- Impulsiveness...

Our word is important. Do we keep our word to others and to the Lord?

Saul impulsively blurted out pronouncements. When your heart is not following after the Lord, blurts of the heart can be particularly damaging and thus revealing.

As the Philistines fell into chaos at Jonathan's victories, Saul rallies his men and decrees, "*Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!*" (24).

Certainly this is foolish, who knows how long the battle will rage; no allowing men to eat is ridiculous. Even more, the statement is full of ego... *I have avenged myself on my enemies!*

Saul's self-aggrandizement is evident. He is not fighting for the Lord or Israel, Saul is fighting for self.

After the initial rout by Israel Saul inquires of the Lord concerning whether they should continue the chase into the night. But the Lord does not answer. Saul assumes sin and has the priests being out the Urim and Thummim. Then another blurt comes across his lips. *"Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today. As surely as the LORD who rescues Israel lives, even if the guilt lies with my son Jonathan, he must die."* (38-39).

It sounds so noble and righteous, but when the lot falls to Jonathan, Saul allows the men's wishes to spare Jonathan and to keep Saul from his foolish vow.

The vow itself was superbly foolish, but this was made doubly bad when Saul broke the vow he made to the Lord (remember Jephthah in Judges 11, he kept his rash vow).

All of this thought about 'the blurts' of the heart caused me to look inward...

- What do 'my blurts' reveal about my heart? Am I motivated by self or service to the Lord?
- Do I keep my word to others and most especially to the Lord?

I am reminded of a Jesus-saying: *A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of* (Luke 6:45).

As I consider 'my blurts'... my heart is revealed...

Lord, my heart is a mixed bag... some refined by Your Spirit and some still scared by sin. Continue refining me. Show me places I still need to surrender to You and give me the strength of will to do all the surrendering You require of me.

My heart needs much repair. Please, Dr. Jesus, perform the surgery I require to be pure and holy before You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, April 28: 1Samuel 15- Obedience is just that...

Reading this chapter and this account of Saul's life a very simple thought came to me. Obedience is just that... obedience. There is no equivocation. There is no changing or altering for any reason. Obedience means that I obey what God says and I don't get to alter or change what God has directed.

I know I will sin, I am not perfect and cannot be perfect, which is why I need Jesus as my Savior. However, what I must not do is to pretend that I am being obedient when I am not. To dupe myself is to block myself from God's great gift of forgiveness because I alter the facts to make it sound like I am obeying when I am not.

Possibly the saddest lines of the chapter was Saul's response to Samuel, *"The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."* But Samuel said, *"What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"* Saul answered, *"The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest"* (13-15).

It sounds like Saul really believed he had obeyed. But he had not. Samuel's instructions were quite clear...destroy everything.

The Lord's Word to me today is a warning for me to be honest with myself before the Lord. So my heart is crying out to the Lord to give me strength to be honest, really and truly honest, with myself and with the Lord.

Lord, I would rather seek Your forgiveness for having sinned that to dupe myself into believing I am obedient when I am not. Saul had many issues, but at the root may have been his lack of a relationship with You coupled with his ability to fool himself. Oh, God, save me from those sins... I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, April 29: 1Samuel 16- God's plan unfolds...

Life is becoming faster and faster. Cellphones allow instant access around the world. Email, texting, Facebook, Twitter, etc. are all increasing the speed of life. Microwaves cook many things in a fraction of the time of a stove or oven, add to that all the 'quick cook' items, like rice in a pouch cooks in 90 seconds. At any moment I can look at my bank accounts and transfer funds with my smartphone, no lines, no hassles... push a few buttons and it's done. Rocket Mortgage advertises that you can get your mortgage in minutes with the push of a button. I can order something from Amazon and have it in 2 days, guaranteed with Amazon Prime.

The skill of waiting is disappearing.

People are growing impatient for life to unfold. For example, relationships take time to develop, often God's plan takes time to develop, too.

Although there are few time markers in Saul's story, it seems his kingship is still in its infancy.

Today we read that David has been anointed by Samuel as the next king. Sounds great, but Saul reigns 40+ years, meaning David will have to wait many years before God's anointing becomes reality! Now David didn't know how long it would take, all he knew was that he was anointed and someday God would bring his kingship into being.

God's plans often take time to unfold.

Will I have the patience to wait and allow God to hone me and prepare me for the tasks He will have me do?

Abraham and Sarah created some problems when they attempted to speed up God's promise by bringing Hagar into the mix. Not only does God's plan take time to unfold, I must be patient and allow God to do His unfolding. To race ahead means problems.

This morning as I sit, I am realizing that all of my time sitting with the Lord and serving the Lord is 'unfolding' time. I don't have the experience of an anointing like David had, but God is using every day of faithfulness to hone me to be a man He can and will use in His time when He needs and I am ready...

Oh, Lord, may I be diligent in my service of You, in my study of You and in my devotion and relationship with You so that I am prepared to serve when You call. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, April 30, 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.

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