

The Weekly Word
May 8-14, 2017

It is May and flowers are bursting forth everywhere. As you enjoy the beauty of the earth may you also enjoy the beauty 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, May 8: 1Samuel 23- What is God saying to you...

The contrast between Saul and David cannot be greater than it is in this chapter. David constantly inquires of the Lord before taking an action whereas Saul operates based on the leading of his gut or advice of others. The text is obvious in its portrayal of David as a man seeking the Lord's leading.

I was particularly drawn to the opening verses.

When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," he inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The LORD answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah." But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!" Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand." So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah (1-5).

What caught my attention was that David inquired of the Lord but when he told the men they questioned him. So he went back to the Lord to make sure he heard correctly the first time. This action of David's plays in many directions.

One, it honors the men, allowing them to be heard rather than summarily dismissed. A good leader values the people with him/her.

Second, it serves as instruction for all the men. They may or may not have known that David had inquired from the Lord the first time. The text is silent on this point. But it is also clear that they all knew David inquired of the Lord the second time. So the men saw their leader checking in with the Lord before a significant campaign. They also knew it was God directing them, not merely David's gut.

Third, David modeled humility. Maybe I miss-heard the Lord's response the first time, so I will ask again. And the second 'ask' is not out of fear or reluctance to obey as with Gideon, rather it had a specific purpose, which I mentioned in numbers 1 & 2 above.

Four, when the second word directs them to battle they go immediately. At this point the concerns of the men are no longer in view, now obedience to the Lord is paramount.

David is a great leader and, more importantly for me, a godly man and I have much I can learn by studying this faith-filled man of God.

Oh, Lord, give me a heart that is steadfast after You. One that will follow You but do so in a manner that engenders loyalty from those who are with me. Help me to be humble like David but steadfast as well. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, May 9: 1Samuel 24- Doing the right and honorable thing...

His enemy was there for the taking, delivered right into his hands, and yet David, guided by principle, refused to pounce.

What set David apart from most, and particularly many of his own men, was that he was guided by principle. He would live according to the Lord's ways and not take the easy way out. No jury would have convicted him but David knew God would not be pleased. Even the minor infraction of cutting a piece of the robe caused David to be conscience-stricken (5).

David paid attention to the still small voice of the Lord within.

Like David I have had an impulse to do something that bends the rules set by the Lord. After takings the first few steps, acting upon the impulse, my conscience speaks up, "This is not the way of the Lord." Do I listen?

David did. But do I?

The still small voice of the Lord is there... do I listen? The Lord is pounding this question home.

We all begin to act on impulse. The question is, 'should we follow through'? David crept up on Saul, maybe he had thoughts of killing him. The text does not tell us of David's internal battle as he waited and then snuck up on Saul. Whatever his intentions we know that he cut a portion of Saul's robe... proof he could have killed him. Even this small act set off David's conscience.

Most certainly David had listened to his conscience –the voice of the Lord –within him before. David has cultivated listening to the Lord.

"Have I?" comes the Lord's voice within me again?

God is pounding me on this matter this morning...

Oh, Lord, forgive me when I have not listened. Make my muscles stronger when I do listen so that I become more and more attuned to You. This is my heart's cry... I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, May 10: 1Samuel 25- Nabal –how we should not live...

Reading the story of Nabal, I began wondering about people who are miserly and those who are generous. Clearly Nabal didn't have to reward David and his men. But it seems that there was some cultural convention, which dictated that given what David and his men did for the shepherds they should have been rewarded in some fashion. Nabal was miserly and he was clearly a rich miserly person. He may have spent as much on his party as it would have cost him to reward David and his men. In fact, some of the supplies Abigail sent might have been earmarked for the party, since it represents a good deal of food already prepared.

Whether it was for the party or just part of Nabal's general supplies, it was food he had on hand and food he could spare.

In the New Testament, Jesus and Paul both laud generosity, generosity toward God and generosity in caring for the church and those in need. Nabal represents how we should NOT live, thinking only of self.

As is often the case the Lord begins to use the text as a mirror into my own life, causing me to consider my generosity and my miserliness. Sometimes I just don't want to be generous... is it prudence or miserliness? This is the question of the morning. Thinking through some of the situations, I wonder if I have some situational biases... certain people, types towards whom I am prone not to be generous. Yikes, this raises the favoritism issues from James, chapter 2...

I am so filled with sin...

Lord, continue to search and probe me. Pick beneath the surface and root out sin from my life. Please, Lord, please. I desire to serve You fully.

Open my eyes to areas in my life that need to change so that I might grow in You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, May 11: 1Samuel 26- Proof of integrity...

David makes a valiant, some might say foolish, effort to prove his integrity. He sneaks into the middle of Saul's camp and steals Saul's spear and jug, both positioned right by Saul as he slept.

For the second time David refuses to kill Saul, God's anointed.

After making his escape with the king's possessions David announces to the camp what he has done. From beginning to end this was an 'all out' play to prove his integrity.

Had David been caught he would have been killed on the spot as an intruder trying to harm the king. The only play that didn't result in David's death was the one that happened. It was a desperate gambit.

How much was his integrity worth to David?

How much is my integrity worth to me? How much is your integrity worth to you?

Is it worth paying additional taxes because you file with honesty?

Is it worth returning to the store when you are given back too much change?

Is it worth admitting to something you have done when you could have gotten away with it?

Again, how much is your integrity worth to you?

And when we stand before the Lord and He queries how we used our life and how we shined the light of Jesus through our living, how much will a life in integrity mean then?

Lord, David was a man after your own heart. Integrity was just one life attribute that grew out of his love for and emulation of You. I pray that love for and commitment to You would blossom in a life of integrity and other God-honoring character traits in my life. I pray this through Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

Friday, May 12: 1Samuel 27- Ruthless days...

It is hard for me to wrap my head around the life David lived. The days in which he lived are so different than my life... harsher and rougher. To provide for his men and family David spent a year raiding towns and killing everyone; men, women and children. Today we would call him a murderer and thief or possibly even a terrorist.

While the text indicated a smidge of honorableness in David's actions: *Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.) Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish (8-9).* These peoples were not Israelite but ancient enemies of the Israelites; there is for me still a horror in David's actions.

I equate David's actions with the wildwest US military raiding parties who killed thousands of Native Americans and for that matter, Native American raiding parties who killed many settlers during those years as well.

I also struggle to think that this same David wrote so many of the magnificent Psalms. I thumbed through some of the Psalms...

Psalm 41:1-3: *Blessed are those who have regard for the weak; the LORD delivers them in times of trouble. The LORD protects and preserves them—they are counted among the blessed in the land—he does not give them over to the desire of their foes. The LORD sustains them on their sickbed and restores them from their bed of illness.*

And

Psalm 26:1-11: *Vindicate me, LORD, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the LORD and have not faltered. Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.*

I do not sit with the deceitful, nor do I associate with hypocrites. I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, LORD, proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds.

LORD, I love the house where you live, the place where your glory dwells. Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with those who are bloodthirsty, in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes. I lead a blameless life; deliver me and be merciful to me.

This man raided and killed unsuspecting people.

I don't know what to do with this. I also have never fled for my life, spent years on the run from a powerful and cruel adversary all the while being responsible for the care of few thousand people (600 soldiers and all their family members) while on the run.

One thing about the Bible is that it doesn't sugar coat its heroes, we see them in their raw humanness.

I still know integrity matters (yesterday's lesson) and that living up to God's laws matters. I also know some people are forced into horrible situations and have to make terrible decisions.

I just pray:

Lord, should I ever find myself in those kinds of situations I pray I will remain true to You. I pray, too, that my heart never grows hard and cold. Like David, for all his faults and humanness, he remained a man after Your own heart. May that be true of me, too... May that be true of me, too. Amen.

Saturday, May 13: 1Samuel 28- Can you admit failure?...

This is such a peculiar story with many open questions. Rather than dwell on the difficult parts of the story, I found myself meditating on the story as a unit. Saul, who expelled mediums from the land, chooses to find and go to a medium in a time of crisis.

The Lord stopped speaking with Saul or answering him by way of prophet or priest. *He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets (6).* Instead of humbling himself, admitting guilt and seeking restoration with the Lord, Saul does what he knows God abhors. He seeks out a medium.

Why is it so hard for some of me (us) to admit failure and sin?

In the life of Saul we can see how disastrous it can be to be so full of pride we cannot face our failures and sins!

As soon as I wrote those words above, God spun the tables on me... probing me. Why are there times when I find it difficult to admit failure and mistakes? What is it in my life that drives me, at times, to act/pretend I am perfect?

This question and others the Lord has asked me are never simple to answer. They require time with the Lord and honesty with myself...

After spending some time with the Lord... my time for closing prayer came.

Lord, recently I needed a root canal. It was not fun. The pain before and the procedure itself was no joy. But the fact that I no longer have pain in my tooth and running up to my ear is sooooo good. It is freeing.

I pray that as I deal with my true self, times of probing may not be 'fun' but my hope and trust is that freedom and joy will result as I move closer to You and allow more of your light to shine through me. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, May 14, 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.