

The Weekly Word
July 10-16, 2017

Summer is in full swing... temps are warm, humidity is high and life hopefully is moving at a slower pace. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, July 10: 1Kings 22- There comes a day of reckoning for every person...

Kingly alliances are a funny thing. Generally there is some benefit for each party in the alliance. This is true to this day. About 6 weeks ago all the ministers of NATO met in Europe. With a new president in the US and changes coming in the UK, the ministers wanted to make sure their alliance was strong because each member nation receives a benefit by being part of NATO. Does every nation agree with every policy of the other member nations? No, but they set aside differences for the sake of security that NATO brings to its member nations.

Israel and Judah had an alliance. Jehoshaphat didn't follow the religious practices of Ahab and Israel, but they were stronger and more secure together.

The differences between the two kings could not be more obvious than in today's chapter. Ahab ridiculed the prophet of the Lord and when Micaiah spoke an unfavorable word from the Lord, Ahab had him jailed. Given all the ways the Lord has tried to get Ahab's attention, Ahab still rejects the Lord.

There comes a day of reckoning for every person!

Ahab's day had come. The Lord called and called but Ahab never answered. He steadfastly followed his own heart rather than following the Lord.

I wonder if Ahab had an inkling that Micaiah spoke correctly. Why else would he go into battle in disguise while encouraging Jehoshaphat to enter battle in full kingly regalia? Whatever Ahab's reason, a disguise didn't protect him.

When God deems our time has come, it has come and no human ingenuity can extend our time against the Lord's decree. Ahab paid with his life that day, going to the grave at enmity with the Lord. That is a frightening thought.

The contrast of this chapter could not be more obvious... each person is either living in relationship with the Lord (Jehoshaphat) or is living at enmity with the Lord (Ahab). There is no middle ground. It is one or the other.

Do you stand with the Lord or against Him?

Think about it...

Oh, Lord, I profess again my love and obedience to You. As Joshua said a millennia ago, 'As for me and my house we will serve the Lord!' May it be so Lord. May it be so... Amen!

Tuesday, July 11: 2Kings 1- Who do you turn to?...

Ahaziah doesn't get much ink in the Old Testament and the one story about him is contained in this chapter and is pretty bleak. He has an accident and fears for his life. He wants some answers; he wants a word from God. The sad part is, even though he is king of Israel -10 of the 12 tribes descendent from the patriarch Jacob -he has no idea who the Lord is. So desiring a word from God he sends messengers to a neighboring country to inquire of their god? It staggers

me that Israel has fallen so far so fast. He doesn't even attempt or think of inquiring of the Lord. He goes immediately to a false foreign god.

I have heard it said that faith is always one generation deep. If we steward faith well we can pass it on to the next generation but all it takes is for one generation to sever that chain and there is no faith to pass along.

Ahab, Ahaziah's father, refused again and again to turn to the Lord despite the Lord's repeated beckoning. In doing so he not only doomed his own fate, he severed any sense of or desire for the Lord in his son. Ahaziah pays dearly for his lack of faith (as all people without faith will do).

These thoughts prompted me to consider my faith, not so much for myself, but as a lens to the next generation. Am I living my faith in such a way that the generation after me sees my faith as genuine and authentic? Is my faith a living witness to Jesus and filled with such love and good character that it shines as an invitation for them to believe in Jesus, too?

There are no guarantees that the next generation will pick up the faith, but I want to live in such a way that I give them no excuse not to follow Jesus.

How about you???

Lord Jesus, Holy Father, please send the Holy Spirit to guide me into living an authentic and genuine faith in You. I pray this so that my life might be a living testimony to You. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, July 12: 2Kings 2- Passing the baton...

Today's reading follows the passing of the prophetic mantle from Elijah to Elisha. It is a story rich in inspiration for me.

For instance, Elijah tried numerous times to shake off Elisha so that he would not be there when Elijah departed. Why, I wondered. What was that all about? Of course the text does not explain which simply invited me to ponder and meditate.

Maybe it was a way for Elijah to determine if Elisha was hearing from the Lord directly? All the prophets along the way clearly understood that Elijah was going to be taken that day. Maybe this was Elijah's way to see if Elisha had the primary gift -hearing clearly the voice of God-necessary to take up the mantle of lead prophet.

When it comes time to pass the mantle of leadership on to the next leader it is important to know that the new leader has the primary gifts necessary for the task ahead. Maybe Elijah was making sure Elisha had the metal for the job as lead prophet. Such a mantle was a difficult and lonely position taking a huge amount of internal integrity and fortitude. Maybe all the walking here and there with constant offers or directives to stop and stay along the way was Elijah's final test to see if Elisha had the personality and grind to fulfill the calling as lead prophet of the Lord.

Having the right gifts for a leadership task is one aspect; having the internal fortitude or calling for the pressure demands of the position is a second important facet of the position.

Then finally Elijah puts it directly to Elisha, "*Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?*" "*Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,*" Elisha replied (9). This seems to be a final check, do you really want the position. If you can have anything what is it you want?

Elisha wants it all... double portion is what was given to the #1 son who inherited the father's 'estate' and along with it the responsibility to care for the family. In simple terms, Elisha said, 'I want to be Israel's prophet, to follow in your footsteps, my father.'

'Ok, then one last thing you must do... see me go.'

Having the gifts/skills and fortitude, does the person truly want to put on the mantle of leadership with the joys and hardships involved? Determining this is important, too.

And Elisha succeeds Elijah.

I had one final thought from the closing 3 verses, the strange incident of calling down a curse on those 42 boys... No matter how prepared we believe someone is for the position of leadership, there will be growing pains. Mistakes will be made. It occurred to me today that Elisha may not have fully understood the anointing of God that rested on him... that when he speaks in the Lord's name it will happen. Note how he *called down a curse on them in the name of the LORD* (24). He didn't just speak; he spoke in God's name.

Just imagine how careful you must be if everything you spoke in God's name came true.

I sense Elisha was learning the responsibility of his office...

These are some of the places the Lord took me as I pondered His Word today.

Oh, God, when it comes time for me to pass the mantle of leadership on to someone else, may I do it with the wisdom of Elijah. In Your name, Oh God, I pray. Amen.

Thursday, July 13: 2Kings 3- Respect...

Never underestimate the power of respect.

When we respect someone we are inclined to their wishes should they ask something of us. When we respect someone we want to work with them, help them and bless them. Respect is a powerful connection between people.

Elisha respect King Jehoshaphat so when he and his men, plus the men with King Joram, found themselves in dire straits with no water, Elisha came to the rescue providing a miracle through the power of the Lord. The account makes it clear that had there been no respect for Jehoshaphat there would have been no consideration of a miracle for King Joram.

True respect is earned. A certain office might command a level of respect, but if personal respect is not earned through integrity and effectiveness, for example, even respect of the office will wane.

Now respect isn't only for governmental leadership. Respect cuts through all relationships. Healthy friendships are built partially on respect.

Not surprisingly God's whisper begins to blow, "Bill, are you a person people respect?"

I began to consider what personal traits I look for in people I respect.

Personal integrity

Treating other people with dignity, kindness and humanness

Genuine faith

They have the capacity to respect and honor others.

There are other traits I am sure.

Then there are traits that dismantle respect for me:

Arrogance, tops my list

An attitude that dismisses others

Hypocrisy... you tell me what you think on a matter –I may disagree. However when you say one thing but your life tells a different story, respect disappears in me.

Again there are other respect-killers in my book.

Finally God asked me if I live the respect traits and avoid the respect-killers.

How about you, are you a person others respect?

Lord, as I begin to pray about this, it occurred to me that being a person who exhibits the fruit of the spirit also garners respect. Help me to grow in traits that make me a man others respect. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, July 14: 2Kings 4- What do you have?...

Elisha as a miracle worker is certainly established in this chapter. I was attracted to verse 2. The woman is in need, her sons are to be sold as slaves to pay off her debt after her husband's death. She comes to Elisha for help.

He asks her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a small jar of olive oil" (2).

I love the question, what do you have in your house? God is going to help her. Elisha will do something, but he begins with what she has. There is something powerful about that for me. The idea that the Lord begins with what we have blesses me. It seems to be an illustration of how God often works... He takes our meager portion multiplies and/or refines it and then uses it for kingdom success.

I find myself being asked by the Lord, "What do you have, that I might use for kingdom advance?" Sometimes our simplest responses become just what God uses.

Years ago I attended a midweek service to interview a potential speaker. The service was packed, there were even chartered busses from another state bringing people to the service. After the service they served a simple meal. The pastor told me the meal was added to the morning events after he asked a woman what she could offer the Lord. She responded, I don't have much but I love to cook. Thus a meal ministry was born which serviced the Tuesday crowd but more importantly, the elderly who needed a good meal, and others.

What do you have that you might offer to the Lord?

Only God knows what He can do with that. After all it was a partial jar of oil that saved those two boys from slavery and provided for this family for years to come.

Oh, Lord, I offer you my love of woodworking, teaching and preaching, a heart for the underdog... Use any of these or anything else I have for Your glory and honor. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, July 15: 2Kings 5- ...

The contrast between Naaman and the king of Israel jumped off the page at me. Israel's king was skeptical and saw the request for healing as a ploy to start a war. He never displays even a momentary sense that God could actually heal Naaman. Naaman, on the other hand, was in need and looking for a miracle.

Yes, Naaman has a 'faith' hiccup. I might have had one, too. The prophet never even came out to meet him. All he did was send his servant who said, 'Bathe in the Jordan.' I don't think it is unreasonable to expect to see the prophet and that he might do something dramatic, but that was not God's way this time. A simple command to bathe was what God was going to use to heal Naaman. After a short time of insolence, Naaman's servant talked some sense into his master and he did as the prophet directed and was instantly and completely healed. From start to finish—excepting the faith hiccup—Naaman believed God could and would heal him.

Even more, so convinced by the miracle was Naaman, that he chose to put his faith in Yahweh as his God. Seeking a healing led to a confession of faith in the Lord.

Surely the king of Israel heard about this miracle, and yet even after the miracle he didn't have a faith moment.

It never ceases to amaze me how different people can have such different responses to a move of God's hand! Israel's king remained faithless; Naaman discovered faith. Absolute opposite responses.

What is your response to this account from the Bible? Does it draw you to or deepen your faith in the Lord or does it have no faith effect on you?

Think about it...

Lord, I smile, the story of Naaman reminds me that You are a miracle working God and that You are calling people near and far to come and walk with You. You healed a foreign general and drew him to Your side. You are calling people of every tribe and language and nation to Your side to this day. Use me, Lord, as an ambassador of Your work. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, July 16, 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.