

The Weekly Word
July 17-23, 2017

As the summer heats up, I pray your time with the Lord is heating up as well. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, July 17: 2Kings 6- Using gifts to serve...

Elisha is quite the miracle worker. The stories continue to compound regarding his miraculous exploits but none are for his personal benefit. In fact only the time he acted in his personal interest was way back at the beginning of his ministry when he called a curse on the young boys making fun of him. That sad exploit has never been repeated and from that time his miracles have been to help others.

This launched my devotional thought into contemplating God's gifts given to people. In 1 Corinthians 12 we are told that spiritual gifts are given for the 'common good'. In other words, God gave them for the growth and care of believers, not simply for the enjoyment of the individual. Like Elisha, the gifts God gives are to help others and extend His glory, not one's own.

I think by extension we can apply this principle to our natural gifts as well. Are we using them to help others as well? Obviously, natural gifts are also used to provide for our family and self. However, do we hoard them, thinking only of self or are we generous with the natural gifts God has given us, using them for others as well?

Elisha lived to serve God, which meant he needed to serve God's people. Do I live as magnanimously as Elisha did? Do you?

Think about it...

Lord, so many of the saints in the Old and New Testaments lived for Your glory and the betterment of Your people... Elisha, Paul, Peter, Lydia, Timothy, Elijah, Samuel, Moses and Joshua to name a few. Help me, Lord, to follow their lead, to live for You and Your people, to advance knowledge of Your name and fame around the earth until the glory of Your name covers the earth as water covers the sea. I pray this in Jesus' name and for the glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Tuesday, July 18: 2Kings 7- Stubborn kings and hardened hearts...

Elisha predicts and God executed an incredible miracle that saved the life of the people of Samaria. However, where is the repentance? Where is the return to the Lord? Nowhere to be found.

I continue to be dumbfounded by Israel's lack of response to the Lord's graciousness. Why can't the leaders see what the Lord is doing for them?

I have no adequate answer, at least from the human plane, why some believe and some do not. Whether it is in the Old Testament or New, the first, second or third millennia following Christ, responses are the same. Some turn to God in belief and others do not. Why I do not know.

I am left to fall on the mercy of God. The most outstanding preaching and the most wonderful miracles do not guarantee people will repent.

I am left to fall on the mercy of God and pray for God to soften hearts, to open eyes and ears to the wonder of Jesus and God's invitation to reconciliation through faith in Jesus Christ.

I will continue to preach and teach for that is my calling from the Lord and I will pray that the Holy Spirit opens hearts to the saving work of Jesus.

I challenge every reader to do likewise. Do whatever it is God is calling you to do and to pray... pray that the Holy Spirit opens hearts to the saving work of Jesus.

Oh, Lord, day after day remind me to pray for open hearts and lives receptive to Jesus. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, July 19: 2Kings 8- Curiosity but no faith...

Curiosity but no faith, that seems an apt description for Joram, King of Israel. He wanted to know about Elisha and his exploits, but he had no honest interest in the God Elisha served. He entertains Gehazi, servant to Elisha, to hear wonderful stories about the man of God, but one never gains a sense that he is willing to trust in the Lord. I suspect he may have been willing to entertain stories of other gods as well, but this hunch cannot be confirmed.

Today, too, there are people who are curious about God; they dabble in this and that. They attend churches, listen to sermons and podcasts, and read books on spiritual topics. They love testimonies about what God or spiritual forces have done and can do. However, they don't give themselves to any one religion or philosophy, much less to the God of the Bible, Father, Jesus Holy Spirit.

Sometimes they even talk about God as if they know him but there is no evidence of Christ-honoring discipleship in their lives. They dabble where it suits them, but never pick up the torch of faith and truly believe.

One of the sad facts, in my opinion, is that the person they are fooling most is themselves. Some of them truly believe they believe in God but whoever or whatever this god is, it most certainly isn't the God of the Scriptures.

Curiosity can only take us so far. It can open the door and encourage us to begin listening to and exploring who God is, but there comes a crucial time when curiosity must give way to heartfelt faith if we are truly to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Have you moved from curiosity to faith? Joram, King of Israel, never did. I hope the same is not true for you.

Lord God, I thank You that Your Holy Spirit prompted me to cross the line of faith and to believe. My life has been changed. I am a new creature and I am Yours... Blessed be Your name, Oh God, Father, Jesus, Spirit. I pray in Your name. Amen.

Thursday, July 20: 2Kings 9- The vengeance of God...

Accounts of vengeance and destruction are never pleasant to read. People being shot with arrows and being tossed aside like road kill. Jezebel being tossed out a window and splattering to the ground only to have her body eaten by roaming dogs. These accounts are not for the faint of heart.

In a world where we sanitize everything, these stories are horrific and then add to this, they were carried out by the word of the Lord.

How do I process stories like this?

For me they are a stark reminder that God will execute His judgment in His time. God decreed that Ahab and his family would meet an end like this. Now is the time for God to bring

His judgment on Ahab to pass. As horrific as Jezebel's end may be, it is just retribution for the life she lived and the evil she did as queen and queen mother.

Sin has its consequences. The consequences of sin are not pretty or sanitized. The penalty for sin is death and destruction. As horrific as these earthly consequences might be, the spiritual consequences of sin, hell, eternal destruction, are far worse.

Accounts like the one I read today, remind me that every human being is on the road to destruction unless she or he steps off that road onto the way of Jesus. Believing Jesus to be Lord and God and following Him as his disciple is the only road to salvation.

Are you on the roadway of Jesus? Are you His disciple?

Consider your life... who is your God?

Oh, Lord, thank You for opening my eyes and heart to Jesus and His message of reconciliation, forgiveness and redemption. I love You, Lord. Help me to share Your way with others effectively and lovingly. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, July 21: 2Kings 10- Careful or careless?...

Jehu's story is one of faithfulness and carelessness. Jehu is zealous for the Lord executing all of God's judgments upon the house of Ahab. Jehu used cunning, wisdom, raw might and ruthlessness to see that he followed the Lord's decrees against Ahab.

However at the same time he was careless religiously. According to verse 31 we are told, *Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit.*

The sin Jehu fell into was set way back at the founding of the northern kingdom, Israel, when Jeroboam established an alternative priesthood and sanctuary in Samaria. We are always culpable for our actions, so Jehu is culpable of this idolatry –serving a false god.

What came to me as I pondered this was the role of the teachers/priests. In one respect Jehu was following the teachings passed down to him. Sadly, they were false teachings. I don't mean they were a little off here or there. no, the teachings of the priest of Samaria were an abomination to the Lord. They were heretical and idolatrous, so that the people who followed them were duped. They were not worshiping the Lord of the Universe, Yahweh, but a false and rival god!

Jehu seems to be sincere in his carrying out the word of the Lord that came to him through the prophet of the Lord, but his general worship practices were opposed to the Lord.

As I pondered this it caused me to realize the importance of teachers, preachers, priests and religious instructors. When they teach heretical and false doctrine, they lead people astray. Like sheep, the people are being led to the slaughter. It is no wonder that New Testament writers regularly warn us against false teachers, people who use the name Jesus but yet teach a different gospel. Maybe it is a gospel of human works or a gospel filled with pride, arrogance and promises of prosperity. Whatever the falsehood, people who follow these false teachers rather than the orthodox truths of Christianity are in spiritual peril.

No wonder James explains that teachers will be judged more strictly (James 3:1).

Are the truths you are building your life upon and the spiritual practices and disciplines you follow built on the foundation of the Word of God, the Bible?

Think about this... you won't want to be deemed careless like Jehu.

God keep me planted in Your Word, rooted to You and the plain truth in Your Holy Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Correct me when I am wrong and encourage me where I have things right, so that as a teacher I might give Your people Your Word and nothing less than that. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, July 22: 2Kings 11- Who do you turn to when you need advice?...

How can one possibly reign as king over a land when you are only 7 years old? Answer. A person cannot truly reign at age seven, unless you have a trusted advisor, who can counsel you and guide you as you lead the people.

Joash's story shows me two things. One, God is faithful. God said that there would never cease to be a king in the line of David on the throne. Athaliah thought she had destroyed all the heirs, but God preserved one, Joash. Through the faithfulness of Jehosheba, daughter of the former king and Jehoida the priest, Joash was hidden in the temple for six years. For six years these two hid the young crown prince from his grandmother who usurped authority. These two leaders, and those who cared for the infant prince, risked their lives daily to preserve the Davidic lineage. The Lord preserved their labors, protecting them and hiding Joash from his power hungry grandmother. Through all of this intrigue, God remains faithful to the promise He made to David.

Two, the value of a wise advisor is incalculable. Jehoida, the priest, was a wise man who used his wisdom for the nation's good rather than personal gain. There is no way that a seven year old could reign by himself, but with Jehoida at his side the nation was in good hands. Young or old a wise advisor is as valuable as pure gold.

Sliding across the centuries to today... the same two points from the text remain true. God is faithful. What He says in His Word will come true. God's Word is solid and strong and I can build my life on the promises of His Word. Wise advisors are just as important to me at age 61 as they were for Joash at 7. None of us has all wisdom. Having people who can help me discern truth from error, the best from the good, etc., is a life saving gift.

Who do you turn to when you need advice? This is my question of the day...

Lord, thank You for the people You put around me. The elders at my church, the board members at PRMI ministry, my trusted friends and confidants who want me to succeed in the way of Jesus. Bless these people and give me a heart to listen to them and discern with them. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, July 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.