

The Weekly Word
July 31- August 6, 2017

The story of Judah's kings dominate this week. Blessed reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, July 31: 2Kings 18- Hezekiah, a breath of clean air among the kings of Judah...

One of our children attended school in Colorado and every time we visited, crisp, clean, fresh air greeted us as soon as we stepped off the plane. The air was noticeably fresh and clean.

I had that same sensation of freshness and cleanliness when I began reading the account of Hezekiah. Like David, he was full on for the Lord. The chronicler of Israel's history describes Hezekiah this way:

He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.) Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses (3-6).

Hezekiah was faithful down to the smallest details. He removed the high places and vestiges of foreign gods. He even destroyed a relic of Exodus days –Moses' bronze snake –that had become an idol for the people.

This last part of the story sent my thoughts spinning... it is so easy to take something that was useful and good and begin to revere it in a way that actually turns it into an idol. I believe certain branches of the church do this with iconography, relics of Jesus days and saints, and possibly even the beatification of saints themselves. Something or someone used of God is venerated so deeply that the veneration crosses the line to become idolatry. Now before I wag too many fingers at others, it is important for me to search my own life and traditions to see if I might be doing the same thing in different ways...

Are their 'traditions,' personal or church-wise, that become so deeply engrained that they become idolatrous.

- Could it be that some Christmas traditions have grown to this level? [Dare I even think this???
- Could a church location or piece of property, or something along those lines, ever grow to this level?

The concern I am wrestling with is this, are my eyes only on Jesus, the Father and Spirit, or do I place other things –any other things –at the level of worship?

How about you? Are you doing this anywhere in your life?

Think on this...

Oh, Lord, anything that becomes a God-substitute is a BAD thing. Open my eyes to anything like that in my life I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, August 1: 2Kings 19- Where do you turn in times of trouble?...

When trouble strikes, where do you turn? Hezekiah turned to the Lord leaving us an example of faith in action. *When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD (1).*

I wondered was this real reliance on the Lord or was it a desperate man playing the ‘religious’ card in a time of need?

It didn’t take long for my answer to come. In verses 14-19 we listen in on Hezekiah’s prayer to the Lord. This is a prayer of a praying man. *Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: “LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.*

“It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God.”

Where do I turn when trouble strikes? I hope, I pray, that I turn to the Lord. The Lord is the true answer giver. Sometimes God works in extraordinary ways like He did with Sennacherib. Sometimes God gives human beings wisdom and strength to find the victory as He did with David against Goliath or the Judges earlier in Israel’s history. No matter the means, the Lord is the one orchestrating the way out of trouble and the people I mentioned above knew that. David continually went to the Lord for strength. The Judges were raised up after the people cried out to the Lord for help.

Where do you turn in times of trouble?... think about it

Lord Jesus, You have always been there for me, answering my prayers and cries for help. You have never let me down. Even Your “Noes” are an answer filled with grace to believe and trust. I worship You, Lord Jesus, Father and Spirit. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, August 2: 2Kings 20- Blind spot...

I suspect that all of us have blind spots in our lives... areas of life where we don’t think clearly or see things clearly. With people of faith I think this translates into areas of faith that we do not understand or act with the faith we normally exhibit is the other areas of life.

Hezekiah, it seems, has a faith blind spot when it comes to death. His reaction to Isaiah’s word from the Lord seems out of character. Instead of trusting God, he whines. Instead of speaking directly with the Lord, he bargains and pulls the “I’ve been faithful” card.

The net result is that God extends his life. It may have been God’s intention all along to extend Hezekiah’s life, because that was God’s plan to bring Judah to her knees. But we will never know whether this is correct or a figment of my imagination.

Back to the blind spot idea, I started wondering what my faith blind spots are.

Obviously I do not know... they are called blind spots for a reason ☺. But is there a way I can begin to detect blind spots, areas of weakness in my faith? This is worth pondering some...

I don’t believe I can begin to spot blind spots alone. If I can spot them I will need help.

Accountability... particular people with whom I meet to discuss and do life. Trusted brothers with whom I can open my life, and who I give permission to speak into what they see. This is one possibility. For 5 or 6 years I have been meeting with one brother almost weekly. He offers a

measure of accountability but that relationship is a bit more mentor (me) and mentee (him). I have recently entered another one-on-one relationship that will likely be more peer to peer than mentor-mentee. This affords a greater possibility to uncover blind spots. Also I have recently joined a colleague accountability group, which may provide the best opportunity for uncovering blind spots but time will tell as the group gels and we learn if we can truly go deep.

God's voice... Scripture and the work of the Spirit in one's life. While I believe God often works through others, certainly as I develop my walk with Jesus, I give the Spirit access to bring 'all truth' alive to me.

Together I suspect these are the best two options for uncovering blind spots.

If you, as a reader, have other ideas I would love to hear them...

Lord, show me the areas I need to be growing in and maturing in. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, August 3: 2Kings 21- The mystery of God's ways...

Manasseh and Hezekiah represent the opposite ends of the faith spectrum. Hezekiah followed the Lord more faithfully than the kings before him and yet his son was more faithless than all the kings and even in other nations. How does this happen? If Hezekiah rid the land of all those foreign god influences, then where did Manasseh pick them up? Mothers, wives, friends, the Internet? Oh, there was no Internet in Manasseh's day.

I am trained as an engineer. I want things to be linear and for there to be a formula. Do A and B and you always get C. But with faith, things don't happen like that. People are self-responsible agents. We each make decisions that influence our lives. A small inquiry here, a dabble there and we can stray from God's way.

Faith is never easy. It takes constant surrender to God's will. This means I have to constantly lay aside my will and often the norms of the people around me and I have to march to the beat of God's drum. Hezekiah was willing to do that; Manasseh was not.

Manasseh wanted to exalt self. He uttered a telling quote in verse 4. *"In Jerusalem I will put my Name."*

I wish there was a formula that guaranteed children followed the faith of their parents. But then if that were true, there would be no conversion from one faith to another, people would be locked into the faith of their birth.

Ah, the issue is bigger and more complex than I first imaged it to be...

The best I can do is live my life faithfully and pray that others will see the light of Jesus in my life and be drawn to its glow.

And so the mystery of God's ways continues...

Lord, magnify any light in my life that shines for You so that others will see You and Your way in me and be drawn to it. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, August 4: 2Kings 22- The blessing of God's word...

How far Judah has fallen that the Book of the Law had to be found. That means it was lost and the inference of the text is that it has been a long time since anyone, much less the king and priest, had read the Book of the Law.

No wonder Judah and Israel fell so far from the Lord; they were no longer guided by God's Word. Tradition and the memory of the priests, yes, they had these. However, how easy it is to slip from the actual meaning and teaching of the Word to what I recall the Word says.

Even with the Bible at hand I slip and fall regularly. If I didn't have the guidance of God's Word, oh my, would I be in trouble. Such was the case for Judah and the sinfulness of their practices show that the Word was missing.

It is all too easy to own a Bible but let it collect dust on a shelf rather than read it and study it so that it's life giving truths affect our lives.

If you are reading this blog and the Bible chapter it is built upon, then you are taking a big step toward keeping the Word of God in your life...

Keep reading, keep listening to God's Word and keep altering your life to conform to its teaching. This is what God is saying to me today...

How about you? What is God saying to you through this chapter of the Bible?

Lord, Thank You for Your Word, it truly is a light to my path and a lamp for my feet. Bless You, Lord, for providing Your written Word. I pray this with thanksgiving, in Jesus' name. Amen

Saturday, August 5: 2Kings 23- To have the heart of Josiah...

Even though all the good Josiah did as king was undone by his son, Jehoahaz, I choose to ponder and meditate on the life and reforms of Josiah, King of Judah.

Josiah was an amazing king. His faithfulness is unparalleled in the history of Judah and Israel for that matter. Once the Book of the Law was found he was scrupulous in following it. What the text says of the Passover he celebrated likely could be said of his entire reform and reign. *Neither in the days of the judges who led Israel nor in the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah had any such Passover been observed* (22). As near as I can tell he cleaned up everything, reaching all the way back to the faithless practices that Solomon introduced. Josiah even went beyond the order of Judah to clean up Bethel and Samaria in Israel.

Compelled by faith in the Lord, he took on every evil practice in Israel and brought them into submission to the Lord.

Lord Jesus, Father, Holy Spirit, I ask for the faith and fortitude of Josiah to do what is right in Your eyes, no matter the cost. Period. Amen.

Sunday, August 6, 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.