

The Weekly Word
August 28- September 3, 2017

September already? Where does time go? Enjoy Labor Day Weekend and enjoy your Scripture reading as we jumb back into the Old Testament. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, August 28: Ezra 1- The sovereign will of God...

The text says, *In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing: (1).*

The Lord moved the heart of Cyrus; those words jumpstarted my thinking...

God is Sovereign. God can and does, at times of His good pleasure, move people to do His bidding, even people who do not honor Him as God and Lord. This observation sends thoughts in so many directions.

Some thoughts marvel at the Lord, His greatness, power and supremacy.

Other thoughts wonder why. If God can do this, why does He allow so much suffering and evil in the world?

I don't understand His ways... and why should I? I am a mere mortal, imperfect, sin-filled and finite. God, on the other hand, is immortal, always present, perfect and infinite, above and beyond all things, which He alone created. As Isaiah says:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts...." Isaiah 55:8-9

So I am left to marvel at the Lord's sovereignty. God knows His plan and God is executing His plan. God's plan said "Move Cyrus," so Cyrus moved. For the Lord alone is God and Sovereign.

Lord, I bow to You. You are Lord over all creation. Your Word spoken happens. I submit to You. I acknowledge You. I worship and adore You. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, August 29: Ezra 2- Lists...

Lists can seem trivial at times. Grocery lists, bucket lists and 'to do' lists top my list of lists. The churches I have served keep lists of members, elders, deacons, and pastors dating back to the churches' origins. I recall visiting a church in Europe that existed before the reformation. They had a list of every pastor and priest who served the church dating back more than a millennia!

While I don't necessarily find lists exciting, every list tells a story.

The list of names in today's chapter tells a story. Israel may have been punished for her sins but she was not forgotten. God knew each person by name.

The Bible tells us that God keeps a list of those who are His. It is called the Book of Life (Psalm 69:28, Philippians 4:3 and multiple references in Revelation). All who acknowledge the Lord and live for Jesus have their names written in the Book of Life. When life comes to an end, names listed in the book will be granted entrance into eternity with God. This is a list worth being on!

Are you on the list?

Lord, I am grateful for Your love, that You know me and love me, that You died for me, Jesus. Bless You Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. I pray in Your name. Amen.

Wednesday, August 30: Ezra 3- Time and perspective...

I was struck by the references to time in this chapter. Seven months to get settled and repair the altar so that sacrifices could be offered again (1-6). Then another 1.5 years to restore the ritual life of their faith before they began rebuilding the temple (7-9).

Time, things take time. Anyone who thought restoring temple worship in Jerusalem might be a quick fix was in for a rude awakening.

Often the things of God take time. Pioneering a new work of God in a foreign land or planting a new church in an unchurched community, the work of God takes time. Birthing a new worship service or worshipping community, adding Adult learning classes or starting a small group, the work of God takes time. Growing in maturity and faith, the work of God takes time. Sometimes I forget this. Many of the accounts of the Bible don't include the time it took for events to unfold so I miss that the people labored for considerable time to see a work of God completed.

In my instant world I want things to happen in the snap of a finger, but most often the work of God takes time. I must be willing to give my time to the works of God from which I am called. Time, I am realizing, is one of the sacrificial gifts I can and should give to the Lord...

A second observation that struck me from the text was the two different reactions to the laying of the temple foundation.

...And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away (11-13).

Younger ones, excited that the foundation of 'their' temple was laid, shouted praise to the Lord. Older people, who had seen the glory of the former temple, wept presumably because they knew this temple would pale in comparison to the former Solomonic temple. Both reactions were fair and honest, given their perspectives.

Life colors our understanding of things. Sometimes there is an element of correct and incorrect understanding but sometimes differences are a matter of perspective. Sometimes it is a combination of both...

God was doing a great work but the reactions were extreme. To see it through, the leaders needed to understand each group's perspective. Understanding leads to connection.

Lord, time and perspective... grant me the desire for both that I might grow in You. Lord, also grant me the desire to understand others, particularly sisters and brothers, with whom I do life and live in community. For the sake of the advance of Your kingdom, I pray. Amen.

Thursday, August 31: Ezra 4- ...

Yesterday the text spoke to me about the work of God and how the work of God takes time. Not only does the work of God take time, forces in this world will try to stop and derail the work of God.

Chapter 4 is about enemies trying to stop the rebuilding of the Temple and the reinstatement of Jewish faith and practice in Jerusalem.

First they tried to infiltrate, likely with a plan to disrupt from within. However, the leadership saw through their ruse and stopped the infiltration (1-3).

Next they tried intimidation and discouragement. However, the leaders must have worked and kept the hearts of the people focused on the Lord because discouragement by itself didn't work (4-5).

So they ramped up their intimidation and turned to 'lawsuits' and pleas directly to the king of Persia. This worked, at least for a while (6-ff). The chapter closes with the work on the temple officially stopped by the Persian government.

Now I know that the book of Ezra is not over so the story isn't over...

However, at this interval, things looked bleak. Israel's leaders had to keep believing in the dream to rebuild the temple and God's direction to do so. It would have been so easy to pack up and move away. "We tried, but I guess it wasn't to be..."

Just because God directs us to do some work does not mean it will go on without a hitch. Most great moves of God are accompanied by hard times and seeming failure.

The Exodus didn't start out wonderfully. Pharaoh made Israelite's brick making labors even harder. Then came the plagues. Then the escape with the possibility of defeat at the edge of the Red Sea and so on, but God did bring them into the Promised Land!

The conquest took years with much success and some failure... eventually God gave them the Promised Land.

Jesus endured constant harassment by Pharisees and eventual death on the cross for His victory to be complete.

The early church suffered persecution and still the church multiplied and extended across the Mediterranean Sea and out toward China.

I cannot think of one great work of God that didn't face obstacles, often of the same ilk that leaders of Israel experienced in this chapter... infiltration, intimidation, legal battles and the like.

If we are called to a work of God, we best steel ourselves at the start for a tough road. However, when God is in it, it will succeed by His grace.

I can't wait to read the rest of the story...

Lord, what Israel faced I have faced in my own walk with You. I have been tempted to capitulate and allow compromise with those who are really not of You. I have faced some intimidation. I haven't faced legal battles, thankfully, but others have. Thank You for giving me strength to stand and remain standing. I lean on YOU and will continue to lean on You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, September 1: Ezra 5- Trust the leading of the Lord...

Hearing from the Lord through prophets, the leaders of Israel set to work again on the temple.

Even though the decree against building still stood, the leaders and people followed the voice of the Lord and resumed building the temple. Expectedly, opposition rose but the leaders gave their reply recalling Cyrus' decree and they sent this to the new king Darius for his judgment.

God speaks and the leaders and people follow. That is the element of the account that speaks to me this morning.

The people are beholden to the Lord. His voice is their command. This certainly has not always been the case for Israel (or myself for that matter), but faith rises up on the backs of faith-filled leaders and the people respond in obedience even in the face of opposition. That is what

faith is, believing in things unseen (Hebrews 11:1). Israelite life was still in partial disarray. The Persian representatives in Jerusalem were still bent on stopping them and still Israel resumed construction. Why? Because God directed them.

Often Israel seems to be a negative example –don't act as they acted. However, today the remnant is a role model for me. Even when the situation is against me, if God has spoken I should, in faith, follow God's lead.

Lord, I am not always as faithful as Israel is in this situation. First, I don't always discern clearly and then this gives me an 'excuse' not to act faithfully. Forgive me, restore me, and strengthen me to live more faithfully in the days to come. I am Yours, Lord. I am Yours. Empower me to live like it. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, September 2: Ezra 6- ...God turned the tables

The Lord turned the tables on the people attempting to stop the building of the temple. Instead of King Darius stopping the construction of the temple, he found the record of Cyrus' order and added to it by supplying all the needs for the temple construction and needs of temple worship.

God's people would have their temple and the worship of God would commence in it.

The temple took 5 or 6 more years to complete. The work of God takes time. When it was done the Passover was reinstated in Jerusalem and it was celebrated with joy!

-God keeps His Word. He sent the people back to build the temple and reinstitute worship in the Land...and it was so...

-The work of God is hard work and can take years to accomplish. We must keep at it.

Perseverance is constantly needed...

-There are trials along the journey but there is also joy. Celebrate the joy...

-When God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)...

Slowly the thought emerged, "Where do I see God at work today"? What is my role and how can I join in playing my part and watching God come through again and again?

The work of God takes time. Instead of building a temple now, God is at work building a people from all the nations of the world. We, His church, must keep at it. Perseverance is needed.

Oh, Lord, building a worshipping people, this is Your command. How, Lord, can I be about this? What shall I do? Where do You need me to work? Lead and guide me, I pray. Through Jesus, the Savior of the world. Amen.

Sunday, September 3, 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.