

The Weekly Word
September 4-10, 2017

Welcome to September... I hope you are still enjoying the beauty of the final days of summer. May God bless you as you read His word. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, September 4: Ezra 7- Ezra, quite a man of faith...

Today we finally meet Ezra, the man for whom the book is named. He is quite a man, one worthy of emulation. In verse 10 we read, *For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

Ezra had devoted himself to:

Study of the Law... he knew God's Word. Ezra gave his life to understanding God's Word. More than just reading it, he learned its ins and outs. He mastered its content and understood it.

Observance of the Law... More than understanding it he lived it. Some people know the word of God intellectually, they have a PhD, if you will, in the Word, but it does not affect their lives. Not Ezra, he studied the Word to live the Word. He OBSERVED the law.

Teaching the Law... Ezra has yet another layer, he teaches the law. He shows men and women how to understand and live the law. He reproduces faith in others, faith that will grow and last.

Additionally, not indicated in this verse, *he is a priest of the Law.* Ezra is from the bloodline that administers the law and the rituals of the law in the temple. He offers the sacrifices of the priest.

This is quite a resume and one I can seek to emulate. I can pour myself into learning and studying the law. Like Ezra I can take what I know and put it into practice living God's Word faithfully. I can also help people along the journey of faith... teaching and showing them by example how to live faithfully to the Lord.

God is reminding me I can be a mini modern day Ezra within my own sphere of influence... What a calling!

*Oh, Lord, send Your Spirit that I might abound as an Ezra-like person for Your honor and glory, I pray.
Amen.*

Tuesday, September 5: Ezra 8- God of the big picture and God of the details...

As I sat back after reading this chapter, I pondered on the whole of the chapter. It is full of details. The Word of God named all people traveling with Ezra in this great wave of repatriation of Israel. Next came the search for Levites and the text names the families and the numbers of Levites who came. After that the chapter chronicles thoughts about safety during the journey and the parceling out of the offerings and articles of God to the families who will carry them to Jerusalem. The chapter concludes with everyone and everything making it to Jerusalem safely. It is all about details...

The Lord, I thought, cares for the details as well as the end results.

In life I hear the phrase, 'The ends justify the means,' but with the Lord that isn't so. The means and the details are as important as the ends. Ezra had bragged on God that God would

protect them, so it was important for him not to ask for armed guard for his travels. Neither could he buy mercenaries with the money given, so he prayed and then traveled. God came through.

A small detail about the trip, yet important enough to be recorded in God's Word.

How we go about accomplishing the works of God is as important as the works themselves. God is honored in the details as well as the outcome.

This led me to the thought, how we live in the day to day is as important as the trajectory of our lives. God is not only interested in our doing good, but the manner of our doing as we do the good we know God would have us do...

Both the details of our doing and the end result matter to the Lord. How I live today and all of my todays, the character traits I exhibit throughout my days are important.

As a child of God and a follower of Jesus all of my life, the big picture and the details should honor my Lord.

May the words of my mouth, the thoughts of my mind and heart and the deeds of my hands be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Wednesday, September 6: Ezra 9- Broken before God...

The stain of the people's sin of intermarrying with the pagan people of the land hit Ezra hard. *When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled* (3). Appalled is a strong word!

He abased himself all day until the evening sacrifice and then he fell on his face before the Lord in prayer and confession.

I wondered, why am I not as deeply appalled by the sin of God's people today? Why do I say little or nothing about the lack of faith in God's church? The abortion rate and divorce rate is statistically the same for Christians as non-Christians. We are so much like the people of the world; we are virtually indistinguishable. How can that be???

As I sit, I wonder how different am I.

I think it was Lloyd Ogilvie who first said, "If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" I wonder would I be convicted.

Ezra's jealousy for the Lord shames me...

Oh, God, forgive me, wretched sinner that I am. Through Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, September 7: Ezra 10- Repentance of the heart...

It is one thing for the religious leader to be broken by sin of the people. It is another for the people to recognize their sin and be willing to repent. This chapter is the story of the people; they recognize their sin and are willing to repent and change. Halleluiah!

A significant aspect of the account that I recognized is that Ezra the leader did not force upon the people repentance. Other leaders saw in Ezra righteousness and were convicted of their unfaithfulness to the Lord. Their newfound faithfulness rippled out among the people until the people of God embraced their sinfulness and repented.

In fairness to the text, some pressure was exerted on the people by the leadership, but it wasn't life threatening or unduly coercive. Clearly God was at work. The priests presented the concern clearly and people responded.

Again the leaders were not heavy handed, but they were clear...

For life change to be real and true it must come from a heart convicted and willing to repent. Coercion leads to outward change but not the inward change that God desires.

Lord, I surrender to Your gaze. Examine me and point out my areas of needed change. I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen

Friday, September 8: Nehemiah 1- Disturbed by things that disturb God...

Knowing that the restoration of Jerusalem was underway, Nehemiah is shaken by reports from Jerusalem. He is so shaken he weeps much of the day when he hears the news and begins an immediate fast. Nehemiah acted as if there was a death in his family. *They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven (3-4).*

I don't believe I have ever been as broken as Nehemiah as this chapter opens. The thought that rattled me was wondering if I have ever been broken by something that breaks the heart of God? It is not the external reaction I am wondering about but the internal pain.

Nehemiah was broken by the state of affairs his brothers and the city of his God were in. Again I wondered, have I ever been broken by the condition of my fellow Christian somewhere in the world or by the condition of the church. I am not sure I have.

Now is this because it is not my calling to fix or attend to something like this or is it selfishness and hardness of my heart? Ouch!

A final question emerges. Am I passionate enough for God and the things of God that I **would** be broken by something that breaks the heart of God?

As I sit this morning I see a passion for God in Nehemiah, a regular guy with a secular job. Nehemiah's example invites me to let go the safe in order to see if God is leading me into some surprising faith adventure. As friend of mine often says, "Stay tuned..."

Oh, Lord, my God, break my heart with the things that break Yours. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen

Saturday, September 9: Nehemiah 2- Fear is not an enemy of faith; inaction is ...

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid (1-2).

I never noticed the timing before. Chapter 1 takes place in the month of Kislev in the 20th year. Chapter 2 happens in the month of Nissan in the 20th year. Almost 4 full months lapse between chapters 1 and 2, such was the trepidation Nehemiah felt about the situation and his ultimate request to the King.

Fear is not necessarily an enemy of faith; inaction is. Nehemiah labored for 4 months with the pain he felt for Jerusalem. He prayed and mourned and obviously planned. Eventually his heartbreak showed on his face and the king noticed. This leads to the moment described above.

Fear welled up in Nehemiah, but fear didn't cripple him and that is the key.

When we do something new for God fear often rises in us; it certainly does in me. In the moment of final decision does fear or faith win? Faith won in Nehemiah and he answered the king and laid out his plan and God gave success. The same scenario works to this day.

When faith wins in that moment of decision we step out following the Lord's leading and God brings the success!

The issue is not fear or faith. The issue is does fear inhibit faith or just precede faith?

I confess that I have experienced both fear inhibiting faith and fear preceding faith. The Lord is using the example of Nehemiah to encourage me to choose the latter... fear preceding faith.

It is human and natural to feel fear at something new or different or big. It is in those moments that I have to reach past my fear and grab hold of faith; believing God has called me to step out acting as I believe God would have me act.

Recognizing that fear often precedes faith is freeing....

Thank You, Lord, for this revelation of understanding. Fear does not mean I am bad or ill equipped or anything negative like that. Fear indicates I am human. In those moments of fear I need to reach down into the reservoir of faith and grab hold of what You put in me. Halleluiah, to You be the glory!

Thank You, Lord, for this realization. Now may I have the strength and courage to live it! Amen and amen.

Sunday, September 10, 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.