

The Weekly Word
September 18-24, 2017

Fall is in the air... may the crispness of the weather stimulate you to read God's Word with vigor! Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, September 18: Nehemiah 9- Rededicating my life to Jesus...

Israel is at a turning point, the people are coming clean with the Lord. This isn't simply an emotional response. The people have taken 3 weeks to consider their lives in light of God's Word. They have gathered again, spent the morning in the Word and the afternoon in confession. Then the Levites rose and recounted Israel's long history, a history of God's faithfulness and their unfaithfulness. After all this time and thought we read: *"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it"* (38).

Thoughtful, honest confession and rededication to the Lord. What a glorious day and time!

When was the last time I (you) took time to make a thoughtful, honest rededication to the Lord?

Hmmm, I believe I have my charge for the day...

Will you join me in rededicating myself to the Lord?

Oh, Lord, You have always been there. It is I who have walked away time and again. Today I choose You. I name You as my Lord and Savior... again and still, I am Yours. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, September 19: Nehemiah 10- Vows...

The people made vows to the Lord and sealed it with their names. *All these [those whose names are recorded] now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.*

"We promise..."

There is a power and permanence to a signature. Just the other day a couple came into the office to have our administrator, who is a notary, notarize some contracts they had to sign. Mortgages, adoption papers, marriage certificates, gym memberships all require our signature. Our signature makes them legally binding, that is until we break them.

Putting your signature on a document, vow or contract does ramp up its significance.

In a court room, witnesses don't sign a paper but they do 'solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, so help me God' and this is recorded by the court recorder. Again the point is to solemnize the importance of the proceeding and bind one to his or her testimony.

I give something extra thought before I sign it...

Vows are significant.

Israel vowed to follow the Lord. In reality this was a renewal of their circumcision vows and their priestly consecration for those who were priests.

These vows will not guarantee compliance but they do seal this moment of dedication and renewal.

I am wondering about vows I have made to the Lord and also about moments of dedication and rededication to the Lord. Those are powerful moments often sealed with a signature or a verbal statement to others.

Every time a new member stands before the church or a family comes forward for baptism we, the congregation, have an opportunity to renew our vows to the Lord as we make a vow to support those who stand before us.

Vows are important markers... and today I vow:

To be faithful to the Lord, to serve Him and Him alone as my Lord and Savior. To follow Jesus and to dedicate my life to His service. I vow to honor God—Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit—with my living to the best of my ability. By God's grace and through Jesus' name I make this vow and prayer. Amen.

Wednesday, September 20: Nehemiah 11- You are important to the Lord...

Some chapters of the Bible, like this one, are difficult for me to find inspiration and/or a devotional moment. Honestly, I do not care about the names of people who lived in Jerusalem.

Interestingly, God cares. God cared enough to put a full page of these names in His written Word. And over the millennia countless scribes cared enough for God's Word to meticulously copy these names from one manuscript to another while preserving God's Word for generations.

As I sit today, musing about all this, these thoughts are sparking a picture in me of how much God cares for you and for me.

Let's be honest, my life is about as stimulating and inspirational as the names in the chapter. Oh, my life is important to me and these facts were important to the families repatriating Jerusalem. The blessing is both and is important to the Lord.

You are important to the Lord. I am important to the Lord. Even if we are not important to anyone else, we are important to the Lord and this is something inspirational for me.

God cares for you and for me and that is a great blessing... to me and I hope to you as well.

Lord, I marvel at Your grace and love. I am cared for by You. This truth blows me away. Little old me, a nothing in the landscape of the world and You care for me. I am so blessed.

Thank You, Jesus, for revealing this to me. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, September 21: Nehemiah 12- Grand Celebrations...

The chapter concludes with a crescendo of celebration. Nehemiah and the leaders organized a spectacular gala of music, song and sacrifice atop the walls of Jerusalem, marking and honoring the completion of the walls. Jerusalem was now reestablished. The temple was up and running, The walls and gates surrounded the city providing safety and security.

God was faithful and His people were back. Punishment was over. Service can begin again!

The Lord was faithful still.

Those last words typed are important for all to hear. Yes, the Lord is faithful. He always has been and always will be. Grace and mercy flow to His covenant people. His Word once given is steadfast.

Thoughts shift to the New Testament and the words and promises of God therein. My heart lightens. God is faithful and it is good to celebrate...

When by God's grace milestones are crossed and great endeavors accomplished... celebrate.

When God's faithfulness is experienced, let people know... celebrate.

When God brings new life out of rubble... celebrate.

Bring people together and celebrate because the Lord is God and His love endures forever.

Lord, I bless You and thank You. I am not much of a celebrator... help me learn the delight of celebrating You and Your graces in life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, September 22: Nehemiah 13- Diligence is constantly required...

How quickly sin can reenter life. In chapter 10 people willingly made vows of faithfulness to the Lord, now by chapter 13 they have fallen back into sin again. Certainly time has passed but...

I am struck by the tenacious relentless pull of sin. We are never safe from its tentacles. It pulls and claws at every one of us. It never lets up.

As sad as this account is, it causes me to realize that I am in a constant battle against sin. When I lower my diligence for a moment I am susceptible. Diligence is constantly required and still I fall!

As I sit this morning, I am so blessed that the Lord has provided the gift of forgiveness of sin when I succumb to temptation. Week after week in worship we remind ourselves that *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness* (1John 1:9). What an incredible gift is the forgiveness for sin!!!

I had a second thought as I read this chapter. It came from verse 1 & 3: *On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, ... When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.*

I wondered, is it sin if we extend the reach of God's law, making it more stringent than God required. In verse one God excluded Ammonites or Moabites, but the Jews excluded *all who were of foreign descent*. Hmmm, this just made me wonder... I have to ponder this more. Interesting how sin can creep into life in so many ways, some that even seem like I am doing 'good'.

Lord, sin is so pervasive. It is an enemy I must be constantly vigilant against. Help me! I feel like I am not strong enough to fight this enemy by myself. So, Lord, I beg for Your help and strength to remain faithful to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, September 23: Esther 1- Mark your words...

I found myself thinking about the king. What if every word we decreed was written into law and then could not be undone. (This will come up again later in the book with the decree against the Jews.) What an incredible onus we would carry if every word was recorded as law.*

I have read Luther's Table Talk. Luther was so famous that people would join him for meals. They would listen to him discourse on whatever subjects surfaced and ask him questions on all manner of matters. Often someone would scribe what he said. Imagine someone making a permanent record of anything you said.

Apparently our presidents record many of the phone conversations and meetings... every word recorded for posterity.

Helpful words... recorded

Caustic words... recorded

Well thought-out words... recorded

Thoughtless words... recorded

Truthful words... recorded

Lies and twists of truth... recorded

Every word... recorded

I would probably be more embarrassed than overjoyed if all my words were recorded and known by others. I think knowing all my words were recorded would give me pause to speak more carefully, guarding my lips with special care.

While I do not have a constant recorder going, I do know that someday I will stand before my maker and He will have knowledge of every word spoken (*But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. Matthew 12:36*). Knowing this I still utter thoughtless words, lies and all manner of speech. Oh, the wretched sinner that I am.

Lord I am overwhelmed this morning by my sinfulness. I deserve nothing except wrath and yet You have lavished love, forgiveness, grace and mercy. As overwhelmed as I was with my sinfulness I am more overwhelmed by Your lavish love.

May my lips sing of Your praise today and all of my todays. Though Jesus I pray. Amen.

*I realize not every word of the king was recorded and law, but this is where my thoughts went as I pondered the text as a doorway to my walk with the Lord.

Sunday, September 24, 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.