

The Weekly Word
September 25-October 1, 2017

October is upon us; another year is speeding by us. I hope and pray that your life in God's Scriptures is enriching your life. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, September 25: Esther 2- The workings of God take time...

Lately I have been paying attention to the time and date cues included in the text. The king's party from chapter 1 happens in his 3rd year. Esther's elevation to queen does not happen until his 7th year. *She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign* (16). Four year lapse within the white spaces of those chapters

Four years can be an eternity for us. In four years our 'newborn' will grow into a preschooler almost ready for kindergarten. In four years our high school freshman will leave for college and our college freshman will hopefully enter the workforce. Four years is a considerable amount of time.

The Lord spent four years preparing Esther to become queen. This is only the beginning of the story that will save the people of God from an evil plot to exterminate them.

God sees the end and the beginning and everything in between. God stands above and outside of time and yet He works within time to bring His will to be.

We can become frustrated when it feels like God is too slow in acting but we have only a limited knowledge of things. In the case of the Jews they had no idea that there would be a problem, and yet God was already acting on His solution. Think about that. God is acting on a solution to a problem that hasn't erupted yet! That is covenant love. That is providential care. That is the Lord at work.

We are reminded in the Hebrews 13:8 that the Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. So I believe that the Lord is doing similar things today as He did back in the day of Esther. God is preparing solutions to problems the enemy will throw at the church before the enemy picks up the ball and begins his evil windup...

This, friends, is our God.

God knows my needs before I ask them... before I know to ask them and God already is preparing to send His answer to us. Halleluiah. Amen.

Oh, God, You are marvelous beyond understanding. Grand and wonderful and caring and loving and merciful. Providential in Your care and wise in Your decrees. I worship and adore You, my God; Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. To You and in the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, September 26: Esther 3- The story develops ...

Since the book of Esther is a narrative telling the account of Esther's rise to queen and the saving of God's people through her, there are times stages where the story develops. This chapter is one of the stages. It chronicles the backstory of Haman, who is the villain of the story.

The events of this chapter happen concurrent with Esther's early days as queen.

My devotional thoughts took a twist as I entertained the above thought. There are always concurrent stories unfolding that will intersect my life at times and in ways I cannot anticipate. God's fingertip is in those stories. I don't know how or why these things happen but I do know that God is in control and will work out His will.

Esther is in her queen's residence oblivious to the evil plots of Haman unfolding in the king's chambers. However, the Lord is not unaware of these plots. Nothing can be done in secret from Him. In fact Esther's meteoric rise to queen is part of God's plan to save His people from this vile plot.

All this is reminding me that God not only has my life in His hands, but He knows what happenings will intersect my life and how these things can work for His glory.

My responsibility is to walk humbly and faithfully with Him in all circumstances of life that arise. What do I need to do to be in the best place to walk faithfully with the Lord?

I need to stay close to the Lord... I need to abide and remain in Him [read John 15]. For me this means regular times in His Word, meditating and pondering the things of God as I am doing now. It means talking with the Lord as life unfolds. It means the regular rhythm of weekly worship, gathering with God's people in praise and worship. It means finding and maintaining regular connections with other men of faith. My denomination asks every pastor to be part of a pastors covenant group. I am grateful for this directive. Additionally, I have other men I meet with regularly –some weekly- to check in and be real 'in Christ.'

Beyond my abiding in the Lord, I find that I need to maintain a regular pattern of exercise, sleep and healthy eating habits. For me this is part of taking care of the earthen vessel God has given me. Also, life has taught me that I function best when my life is in balance.

Additionally, I need to maintain the important family relationships the Lord has given me. When the home has problems I have problems... ☺

As I sit I do not know who or what will intersect my life in the near future but the Lord knows. Staying close to Him and living a healthy physical and emotional life is critical for me to act wisely as new situations arise.

Looking back over my devotions for today... I didn't see them coming as I began to read the story of the vile Haman. No matter where the Word leads me I am so grateful that the Lord is with me as I open His Word.

Lord, thank You for giving us Your Word. Continue to give me a love for Your Word and a deep desire to ingest it deeply every day. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, September 27: Esther 4- How does God get your attention?...

God had to get Esther's attention. She was living in the king's palace, so she was cut off from her uncle and regular people. She was not gathering or worshiping with other Jews; remember her heritage was kept a secret from others. We have no indication of a significant personal devotional life; again she was to keep her heritage a secret so she couldn't have any scrolls or Torah. All she might have is anything that was packaged away in her heart.

God used her uncle, who likely remained her spiritual anchor, and his words, once digested, were all the spiritual prompting she needed. She immediately turned to the Lord for help, strength and guidance evidenced by her 3 days of extreme (food and water) fasting.

How does God get your attention?

For me a prime element will be His Word. I might be prompted by a comment from a friend, a thought in prayer or a door that seems to be opening. However, somewhere along the road of discernment and figuring out what God is saying, will be His Word. His word is an anchor for

me. I trust it and try to follow it. God's Word is often general in nature, so when specific thoughts, promptings, etc. become a safeguard for me is, does it accord with God's word?

For example, God's Word says we are to disciple all nations, advancing the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In 2007 when an invitation to teach in Nigeria came, this specific opportunity fit with God's framework to advance His name to the ends of the earth. Likewise, when an invitation came to teach in Korea later this fall, it fit with my understandings of the teaching of Jesus.

For me there is another important step and that is to confer with trusted people. My wife is a very important voice of discernment for things like I mentioned above. My travel affect her directly so that is one reason I discuss these opportunities with her but more importantly, she has great discernment for me. I trust her God-honoring wisdom. The elders of my church are other important voices. I would not accept any outside travel without their blessing.

Following God's direction is so important in walking with Jesus. Have you considered how God gets your attention and then leads you into faith adventures?

Think about it...

Oh, Lord, I am so grateful that You are a God who speaks. Keep my ears and heart open to Your leading, keep me in Your Word, listening. Bless me with Christ following friends who can confirm or correct things I sense are from You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, September 28: Esther 5- When we are seeking God's guidance...

Yesterday's chapter ends with Esther say to her uncle Mordecai, *"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish"* (4:16)

Today the chapter opens with Esther being a woman of her word. *On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance* (1).

When we have prayed it is time to act.

A pastor mentor of mine told me years ago, 'When you are wondering what to do with a decision, you need to make pick a time frame. Then pray, seek the Lord and the counsel of others, and when the time is up follow through on the decision that seems best to you then'.

After we pray asking for guidance we have to step out in faith and act on the sense of God's leading that we have. If our discernment is off, God can redirect us. If it is correct we are moving forward with God's plan. To remain in neutral is not faith, it is a lack of faith. It is much easier to change the course of a moving ocean liner than it is to get it started from the dock.

Faith requires action. So be like Esther, pray, and fast if necessary, seek counsel but when the time comes ACT.

Esther did not know what the king would do when she entered his room, but the time for action had come. Her three days of prayer and fasting had come.

Hebrews 11 has been rightly called the 'faith' chapter. Over and over the writer referenced the faith of biblical men and women. With each name comes the action they took because of their faith.

By faith:

- Abel brought a better offering
- Enoch was taken from this life

- Noah built an ark
- Abraham obeyed and went
- Sarah bore children (see Hebrews 11:4-11)

Faith becomes faith through action. Esther went in to see the king.

Is God leading you? Then step out in faith...

Lord, give me the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah and the other heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, September 29: Esther 6- Coincidence, happenstance, or providence?...

Coincidence, happenstance, or providence? Which word we use is generally dependent upon our world view.

It is an honest portrayal of the account to say what a coincidence that Haman walked in just as the king was deciding how to honor Mordecai the Jew. Equally fair is to say, by God's providence, Haman walked in just as the king was deciding how to honor Mordecai the Jew.

I choose to believe the latter.

Throughout the Scripture and throughout my life, I continually see God's hand at work leading, guiding, and directing situations to bring about His will and to bless His people. Many would not agree with me. That's okay. I cannot prove it and they cannot either. It is a world view decision.

Do you believe God is at work in the world? Do you believe God's hand works to bring about His will and bless His people?

I do.

Thank You, Lord, for your providential care of the Jews through Esther and the care of Your Church today. As Jesus said, 'The gates of hell will not prevail against Your church'. I rest in that and in Your gracious mercy and love. Halleluiah. Amen.

Saturday, September 30: Esther 7- Speaking with tact...

Esther was so wise in her approach to the king. The two-day banquet certainly warmed the king to her. Her gentle come back tomorrow after the first banquet must have aroused his curiosity. Providing fine wine, which would be normal, certainly eased the king into good spirits. On day two when his curiosity couldn't handle it any more the king asked Esther her request. Then, and only then, in the strongest of terms she blurts out her predicament.

[T]he king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?" Esther said, "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!" ... (2-6).

Oh, the tact and power in her approach. Haman was caught in a vice of his own making. His disgust at the Jews as a people and his drive for power signed his death warrant.

But back to Esther, her tact in creating the context coupled with the fierceness of her request, proved brilliant in winning the king to her side with no option for rebuttal by Haman.

If only we, God's people today, would use such wisdom and tact in our world to make strides for God's reign and the advance of the Gospel around the world.

During the summer I studied Luke 16 and the parable of the dishonest, yet shrewd, steward (Luke 16:1-8). Jesus sums up His point from the parable with verse 8, "*The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.*"

Jesus made the point that His followers needed to be as shrewd advancing Jesus' agenda as this worldly steward was advancing his agenda.

Tact, wisdom, and cunning should be some of our weapons, supported of course by prayer, as we labor for Jesus the king.

What do you think and what do you see in this chapter of God's Word?

Lord, give me tact and winsomeness as I speak of You. Today, in particular, I have an appointment where these gifts of tact and wisdom will be highly helpful. Please send these gifts as I speak of You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Sunday, October 1, 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.