

The Weekly Word

October 30 - November 5, 2017

Welcome to the month of Thanksgiving. Happy reading and be sure to give thanks to the Lord for His Word...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, October 30: Revelation 1- Life back then...

It can be common for people to remember nostalgically life 'back then' where the 'back then' is some golden era people dream to return. Church people often remember some former pastor and a time when their church was this or that or they remember a decade in their past when 'life was good.' Some people in the church long to return to the exciting days of the New Testament... as if the goal today is to return the church to the days of the early church and the Book of Acts excitement.

One problem with these statements is that we recall the wonders of the particular time gone by but leave out some of the more difficult parts of life back then.

For those who want to return to the 'early church', love the excitement, the conversions, the miracles and wonders. Truly those are wonderful. However, persecutions and hardships came with those wonders.

I was struck by John's description in verse 9. *I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*

I, John your brother and companion in the:

Suffering; many in the early church suffered for their faith. There were seasons of persecution that are beyond the thoughts most of us have of persecution. Yes, they saw miracles, but many died to see those miracles.

Kingdom... John was a companion in the kingdom, which I take to mean they saw the wonder of people coming to faith and God's reign growing and affecting many. I think we all long for this

Patient Endurance... but to see the kingdom they needed patient endurance. This was a phrase used often to call people to hang in there when life grew difficult, 'Despite hardships and pain keep loving and obeying Jesus. Don't give up'. These are words spoken during the hardest of times to encourage people to stay the course and not bale out.

Those 'wonderful days' of the early church were filled with wonders of God on the move, but they were also filled with costs to the people of God.

The nagging question in my heart, as I hear John's description, goes like this, "Am I willing to endure the hardship to see the fruit of kingdom growth?"

That question has no simple answer for me... I admit I like my comfortable life. I would rather keep my comforts and see the miracles. However, that has not been the way of history and certainly wasn't the way in the early church and the days of John.

Ugh, my selfish 'self' rises up again.

Oh, Lord, forgive me... forgive me... forgive me. My heart still needs much spiritual surgery and repair. Please send Your Holy Spirit and begin the much needed work in me. I pray... in Jesus' name. Amen,

Tuesday, October 31: Revelation 2- God speaks...

Three specific letters written to three different churches. And in some of the letters there was specific information for different groups within the church.

I couldn't stop thinking what letter would Jesus write to me...

What sins would God point out? What works or efforts might God applaud? What would He call me to do that I might not be doing right now?

I am not going to write out what the Lord spoke to me; it is personal.

I am so blessed that I serve a God who continues to speak... in broad overarching ways and in specific timely ways.

One line that jumped out at me as I read. It is verse 23: *Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.*

This hit me because it underscored what I was thinking about, that God has words to speak to each of us regularly. There are words about lifestyle that need to change and sins we must guard against and works for us to do.

I am so blessed that God speaks with me... What a great God we serve!

Blessings to You, my Lord and my God. Thank You for correction and encouragement and words of life and peace. I love You, Lord. I Love You. Through Jesus I live and move and have my being and through Him I pray this morning. Amen.

Wednesday, November 1: Revelation 3- Ugh we are a sin-filled people....

Verse 11 caught my heart as I was reading. *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

I don't know when Jesus is returning and still these words seemed to speak to my heart, particularly the word to *Hold on to what you have...* I take that to mean, hold on to the faith in Jesus that you have.

The world seems to be changing at an accelerating pace. The 'rich poor divide' is widening. General views regarding faith of any kind, Christianity in particular, are fading as people become more post-Christian and post-spiritual. Tensions between East and West are growing. Politics is growing more mean spirited, racial and nationalistic tensions are also growing. I could go on.

Maybe the civility of the past hid many of these same divides, certainly people were no better, but things seem to be rougher and more caustic these days.

Jesus' call to hold on to the faith seems timely. Hold on to the whole of the faith. Maintaining Jesus' values seems more counter cultural today. And sadly some people use the faith to further some of the divides... Ugh, we are a sin-filled people!

Oh, God, help the church be the church! Help me be a faithful Christ-follower in my changing world. Lord God, pour out again Your Holy Spirit so that I and we Your people can rise above the tides of meanness and live counter culturally for YOU. Lord, show me what that means for the remaining years I have this side of eternity.

How shall I use my wealth, my time, my influence to strengthen Your people and Your reign here in my world. I pray this in Jesus' name and for the advancement of the Gospel. Amen and amen.

Thursday, November 2: Revelation 4- Indescribable...

How do you describe something that is beyond description? That is what I felt when I entered chapter 4.

John seems to be describing something that is beyond human eyes to take in and human words to describe.

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. (1-3)

What does it mean to have the appearance of jasper and ruby? What is a rainbow shining like an emerald?

There is more later in the chapter that is simply beyond human ability to describe.

I thought how does one describe seeing God? God, the One beyond all things, is wonder-full and cannot be reduced to words on a page.

This chapter and the next few fill me with wonder and awe every time I read them. The inexpressible imagery... the simplicity of worship and utter devotion to the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

My heart soars. My God is front and center. And the inability to adequately describe the Lord only adds to the beauty and wonder.

Our God, my God, the God of the Bible is beyond description. Halleluiah!

I don't want a God who is humanly fathomable, I want to serve a BIG, Awesome, Beyond-Description God and that is Who I meet in these pages.

Oh, Lord God, forgive me for all the times I try to reduce You to something completely knowable, to a formula, a precept. You are beyond description. You are great and awesome... You are God who reigns over all because You created all things.

I praise You, Lord. I am reduced to a humble ball of nothing before You and joy fills me heart as I worship You. Through Jesus Christ, my Savior's name, I pray. Amen.

Friday, November 3: Revelation 5- All eyes on God...

John continues to witness worship in heaven... all eyes are on God. The songs praise God, the body posture of those in heaven honor God. All focus is given to the One on the throne and the Lamb.

Someone has said that worship today in our churches is rehearsal for our eternity of worship in heaven. If that is so, then we have a great lesson to learn from this scene.

Worship is about God not us. Worship, rightly understood, focuses on God not us.

The question is not whether 'I like' worship or I am blessed by worship or I learn how to live better during worship. NO, the question is, "Was the Lord God honored and praised and lifted up in worship? Was His story told? Were the participants drawn to venerate Him?"

All eyes should be on the Lord, not ourselves. Is God honored is the crux of worship.

I returned to the text and focused on the songs... putting my attention on the Lord for the remainder of my time this morning...

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." ...

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (9-13).

You alone are worthy, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. You alone deserve praise and honor and thanksgiving. I lift my heart and voice and praise You, Lord God Almighty... Who is and was and is to come. Amen and amen.

Saturday, November 4: Revelation 6- The issue of martyrdom...

The message of John’s revelation is a tough one. Imagery, death, wrath and martyrdom fill its pages.

Martyrdom caught my attention reading today. Verses 9-11: *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.*

The words I bolded make it clear that more martyrdom was still to come. Many apparently had already died for their faith, but they were not to be avenged ***until the full number of their fellow servants... were killed just as they had been.***

Martyrdom is not something I think about often, if at all. Being a Christian is so safe in my country and community. Even where I go in Nigeria, I know there is religious violence and some horrible things happen. But still I don’t know people who live with the impending doom of martyrdom. Still around the world people are martyred for their Christian faith (and other faiths, I might add).

If I am listening to the words from Revelation correctly, martyrdom should not surprise us. As horrible as it is, the enemy doesn't play fair and having people pay with their lives for following Jesus is no big deal to the Devil. He is evil and vile to the core.

My particular world would have to change dramatically for me to be legitimately concerned about having to give my life for my faith... but that is not the case for brothers and sisters in other parts of the world.

I wonder when the full number will be fulfilled and Jesus will return.

Until then I pray for the fullness of the Spirit to live faithfully, advancing the will and way of Jesus...

Lord, give me strength, give me courage to live for You, to serve You with vigor and to bring honor to You by the way I live and the things I do. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Sunday, November 5, 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.