

The Weekly Word
December 4-10, 2017

December... may the love and grace of Jesus fill you as you spend time in God's word.
Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, December 4: Ecclesiastes 9- Sin destroys, that is what it does...

Sometimes this book seems so fatalistic and then there are words that spawn thought. Today's reading is a classic example of both aspects; the words that spawned thought came at the very end for me.

The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good (17-18).

Reading these words, I feel like I am reading the pages of the news.

There is so much shouting in Washington (my country's capital) these days but nothing happens. I regularly wonder where are wise who can actually govern, who can see a problem and actually work to solve it. Instead today all I hear are different people yelling at each other and calling each other names. It is a disgrace, if you ask me.

And *wisdom is better than weapons of war...* With the destructive firepower countries now have in their arsenals –especially when you add in nuclear weapons –it becomes a bit more frightening when leaders rattle their sabers. One wrong move could destroy soooo many lives!

Lord where are the wise people who can sit in back rooms and ease tensions? Oh Lord, please send them!

Maybe these people are around, but the news looking for sound bites picks up on the boisterous saber rattling?

Lord, please let cooler heads prevail...

And this brings me to the final words of verse 18, *but one sinner destroys much good*. How true this is. My mind calls up all the lone gun-men and terrorist-truck-drivers we have seen lately. How much evil and how much good they destroy. They destroy people's lives leaving a wake of dead and hurt. They create fear... fear in everyday life, like riding in a city bike lane or attending a concert. They cause us to judge whole people groups rather than realize that bad people come in all shapes and sizes and don't represent the whole.

And I have seen this on smaller scales too, where a sinner destroys a marriage and family. A broken trust destroys a family, friendship or business.

Sin destroys, that is what it does...

O God, every one of us sins. Some sins destroy much more than others. Yes I pray for forgiveness for my own sins, but I also pray for the strength of Your Holy Spirit to avoid sin, especially the sins that destroy in a flash so much. Oh God, I don't want to be the sinner who destroys much good. Cleanse me Lord, cleanse me... I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Tuesday, December 5: Ecclesiastes 10- A strong warning comes my way ...

In another proverb-like chapter, offering thoughts on a wide range of topics, I read and wonder where to meditate. Eventually I settle on verse 1:

As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Consistency, steadiness, staying the path, watching your step, these are only a sampling of phrases that flooded my thoughts as I began to consider this word.

How many lives are ruined by one bad mistake? A bad choice here, a poor decision there, every one of us is capable of these at any time. Cut a corner ‘just this once’ cause nothing will happen, who will find out... or so we think.

A poster child for this proverb could be ‘Joe Pa’ from Penn State. I don’t know if we know all the facts, but his decision to wash his hands of a colleague’s inappropriate actions rather than pursue it destroyed his decades-long legacy.

A strong warning comes my way through this word.

Hold the line. Stay vigilant. Live honorably all the time...

O Lord, give me strength to continue... wisdom and discernment in measureless quantities so that above all, I will honor You all the days of my life. I know I am a sinner, Lord. Help me to keep short accounts with You and by Your grace to avoid folly and the sullyng of Your name. I pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Wednesday, December 6: Ecclesiastes 11- Success or faithfulness...

Another proverb-est chapter; practical wisdom for living. The opening half of the chapter spoke about personal industry and a diversity of work since no one knows which ventures will work.

From this section I felt drawn to verse 6: *Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.* The writer advocates for industry. Day and night do your work.

There is certainly truth in this; hard work is the best route to satisfying ones need for daily bread. But there are no guarantees. This is not an absolute formula for success.

The word success, which I just typed is troubling me. Success is a word frequently used in our modern western world. Success is a cultural word; it is a human desire... at least it is for me. But I am wondering if it has become tainted. In my world success means money, security, a ‘well-healed’ life. My trouble is that success as we often define it was not the life Jesus lived, nor his apostles. Neither was it his or their goal in life. Theirs was to spread the gospel no matter the cost to themselves. Certainly by our 21st century standard neither Jesus nor his disciples were success-full. And yet in God’s eyes they did all the Father asked and they were greeted by him upon their death with the welcome, “well done good and faithful servants.”

They sought faithfulness rather than success.

I am troubled by how much my culture taints my thinking...

Also I suspect we can push personal ‘industry’ too far as well. Certainly idleness can be a problem. But over-work can be one too. For God’s word also says, *In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves* (Psalm 127:2). So I am reminded that we must take into account the full revelation of scripture and not run with a lone verse that may not represent the whole of God’s teaching on a situation.

I circle back to the way my cultural upbringing influence my thoughts and I feel the need to ask the Lord purge those things that are not of Him from my life... many of which come from my culture, which is self-focused and prosperity-oriented.

O God help me to see the chains of my culture which have me bound. Show me so that I might return to You to have them cut off that I might be set free. I pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Thursday, December 7: Ecclesiastes 12- Fear God and keep his commandments ...

And so with this chapter the book of Ecclesiastes closes. The writer gives us his final wisdom. I love the connection between the first and last words of this chapter.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them" (1).

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (13-14).

'Youth years' are notorious for years of wandering and exploration. Unfortunately this often means wandering from the Lord and exploring life outside faith in Jesus. In light of present life, I find the writers words spot on... *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* Honing and hardening and strengthening ones faith during youth years can guide a youth through those tumultuous years and place them on the solid foundation of faith in Jesus for all their years to come. Reaching youngsters and youth with the gospel will reap lifelong benefits for them and for the world in which they live.

For the writer when all is said and done and all his exploration is completed the anchor of life can be simply put *Fear God and keep his commandments.*

I find these powerful in their simplicity... a great personal mission statement.

Are you looking for a life verse? These words would work well.

Fear God and keep his commandments... yes that about covers it.

Lord, Thank You for this simple truth, words to live by... I am a sinner who cannot live these words without the constant work of Your Holy Spirit within. Come Holy Spirit energize and empower me to live as the writer commends, fearing God and keeping Your commandments. I pray this through my savior Jesus name. Amen.

Friday, December 8: Song of Songs 1- Appearance and self-worth...

The Song of Songs is, for most of us, a strange book in the Bible. It is a romantic love story between a woman and the prince, Solomon. Is it meant to be an allegory of God's love with His people? Is it a love story reminding us that love is God's creation? There are many thoughts on this. I tend to read it for face value as a love story between a woman and her man.

I was struck by how sensitive the woman is to her features and particularly her skin color? *Dark am I, yet lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyard I had to neglect (5-6).*

It struck me how large a role appearance plays in her self-worth. And if I am honest it is true for me and most of us as well. Add to the general situation that her appearance issue was being dark skinned. It surprised me that skin color was an issue in that ancient day, but apparently it was. In some naïve way I thought that my country's struggles with a person's skin color was an aberration on the landscape of humanity. But the more I consider this the more wrong I believe my thoughts are on the topic of skin color. A friend of mine who is black grew up in Nigeria and never paid attention to what shade of black a person was. But when she traveled to South Africa, her shade of black was very important. She being a dark black felt discriminated against by lighter blacks...

I wonder why this is? Is it as simple as skin color is obvious to everyone and cannot be easily masked??

How we treat people based on external factors saddens me. It is yet another case of the deep depravity of the human heart.

O God, this whole line of thinking exposes my deep sinfulness. If it is not skin color, it is height or weight or some other human trait. How easily sin-filled thoughts about others can erupt within me over the smallest distinctions and differences. O God, forgive me, forgive me, forgive me for the ways I discriminate and segregation people. It is a breach of Your will for us Lord and a break in Your trust of me as Your son. I pray this through Jesus my savior. Amen.

Saturday, December 9: Song of Songs 2- His banner of love...

When I was in college we sang a song based on verse 4. If my memory is correct it went like this: "He calls me to the banqueting table; his banner over me is love."

That is a pretty accurate translation of verse 4, which in the NIV reads: *Let him lead me to the banquet hall, and let his banner over me be love.*

I found myself contemplating his banner of love...

Taken at face value, how does a lover spread his banner of love over his beloved? Hmm... by creating a safe space, a relationship of warmth, care, concern. These are the kinds of things that spring to mind when I try to visualize a 'banner of love.'

So now I have to ponder how good a job I do spreading a banner of love over my wife and family? Do I create a safe space for them to flourish? Do I set an attitude of warmth, care, concern for my family?

The Lord cares how I husband and father my family...

When we sang that song back in the day, we were singing about the Lord spreading His banner of love over us. I switch gears and ponder God's love over me... I believe God creates a safe space, a relationship of warmth, care, concern. And I am so grateful to the Lord because He really does love me and cover me in His banner of love...

So I spend time this morning leaning into God's love...

O Lord thank You for your love which bathes me daily. And Lord please help me to translate Your love into practical love for my family and others in my life. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Sunday, December 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.