

**The Weekly Word**  
September 1-7, 2014

It is September... time is flying and so does my time in God's Word. I hope yours does too. Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

**Monday, September 1: Ezra 4- Opposition with arise...**

Yesterday God spoke to me about priorities and prioritizing worship and devotion of the Lord as foundational to all of life.

Today God built on that theme, reminding me that all kinds of opposition will arise trying to distract me (and you) from our devotion and service to our God.

First the Israelites opponents tried trickery in order to water down the efforts of rebuilding the temple. Sometimes my most difficult opposition comes from within. Warring factions of my life saying, 'Do this, no do this, no do this'... each trying to keep my eyes and efforts off the prize of being with my God.

Then they tried discouragement. It is easy to look at the Bible and think; I will never read all of this! And so many of the stories, especially in the OT, I mean how do they apply to my life today? And so on, discouragement grows and many give in and stop attending to the Word of God, the entire Word of God.

Finally out right opposition. Phone calls, distractions, early mornings, late evenings... our lifestyle can get in the way of offering the Lord quality time each day to be with Him.

Any of these and many other difficulties will surface, working to keep us from the priority of personal devotion, worship, prayer and service... don't let it. Stand against it and keep to your priority of making your relationship with the Lord #1 in your life.

This is what the Lord spoke to me about this morning...

Think about it.

*Ok, Lord, I am in. I know it will be a struggle, but I commit my heart and mind and will and soul to following You, and You alone. Please come to my aid when I am weak. And don't allow me to get to heady when I am encountering an easier time with less opposition. And Lord, keep reminding me so that I stay the course all my life until I am with You in glory! Halleluiah. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 2: Ezra 5- Honest with ourselves...**

The people of God's honesty about their past impressed me. When queried about building the temple and who authorized them, they gave a fair and honest answer, which began like this:

*"We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, one that a great king of Israel built and finished. But because our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean, king of Babylon, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon... (11-12).*

It was the second sentence that got me. They were upfront and honest about their past.

I generally don't like admitting my failures, and sins. I am embarrassed and disappointed with myself and I'd rather look forward. Given their situation, I would likely have left out the sin and angering God part and gone right to the part about Cyrus sending them to rebuild.

I wondered and meditated on what I just wrote. Am I trying to hide my real self from myself? Am I trying to put on airs about my "goodness?" I am not exactly sure and more time will need to be spent examining my inner self.

One realization I did have is that I might be hiding from myself, and other people, the grace God has poured over me. God's grace took the sinner that I was and redeemed him. God's grace forgave my sins. God's grace made me new. And God's grace continues to do all these things because I am far from perfect. And if I hide from myself who I was, I am missing the wonder of God's grace...

*Grace, grace, God's grace,*

*Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;*

*Grace, grace, God's grace,*

*Grace that is greater than all our sin!*

*Lord God, thank You for all of Your grace; grace that continually flows into my life. Thank You, Lord. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, September 3: Ezra 6- God comes through...**

One great theme of the OT is repeated again. God comes through. When things seemed darkest and the work on the temple was halted... God comes through, confirming the word He had spoken to them. God comes through. His will is accomplished. His word is upheld. And all things are accomplished in a way that increases the faith of the people and the honor of the Lord.

My thoughts flip to one of the great NT themes, God's saving message of faith in Jesus Christ reaching the ends of the earth. Here, too, God will come through. God will confirm His word by accomplishing this task. It will happen.

Question is, "Will I take part in the advance of God's name around the globe or not?" Will I give my service to the King by working to advance God's cause? Will I be numbered with those who labor for God's cause?

God saw to it that the temple was rebuilt, but it took the labor of all the repatriated Israelites to accomplish God's feat. Likewise, will I be part of God's labor force extending His name to the ends of the earth?

Will you?

*I bow today and rededicate myself to Your cause, the advance of Your name, Your ideals, Your will and Your ways to the ends of the earth. Amen.*

### **Thursday, September 4: Ezra 7- Pedigree and diligence...**

The author goes to great lengths to show Ezra's lineage as a member of the priestly by naming his ancestors all the way back to Aaron. Ezra was blessed with his bloodline, a gift to him from birth, which he did not earn in any way.

I began thinking. We all have certain gifts from God, given at birth. It might be ancestry or intelligence or specific talents or certain personality traits, you name it. Question is... what will we do with the gifts God gave us?

Ezra made the most of his ancestry. Ezra knew what being a priest meant so he devoted himself to the Word. Verse 10 tells us, *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.* It doesn't say Ezra was

smart; it says he devoted himself to study... Ezra took the time and gave his heart and soul to prepare for the priestly work, which was his birthright. He didn't sit on his haunches and live off the priestly silver-spoon in his mouth. He developed himself, through hard work and devotion.

I flipped back to thoughts about gifts given by God at birth. Am I developing (are you) and devoting myself to using them for God's glory? Have I honed them with the devotion of Ezra, who honed his ability to teach the Word?

This summer I went on a mission trip with others. I watched a corporate CEO, a therapist, a computer specialist and a mechanic/jack of all trades use the gifts they had been given for the glory of God in ways unique to their gifting's. Gifting each had honed over a lifetime...

Two final thoughts for me (and readers):

1) Are you devoting yourself to honing and developing the gifts God has given you?

2) Are you using them for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom?

Think about it.

*Lord, You have given all of us talents. We can bury them in the sand or put them to work earning kingdom fruit. Help us to do the latter so that at the end of things we will hear You speak, "Well done good and faithful servant...." Amen.*

### **Friday, September 5: Ezra 8- Fasting as second resort...**

I often imagine certain Bible characters as perfect men or women, somehow less human and more godly than those of us who walk the earth today. And generally these inclinations turn out to be false. The men and women of the Bible come off the pages of the Bible as a mixed bag, just like us.

Today I had one of those glimpses of Ezra. He chose prayer and fasting as a second resort, not a first resort, yet the Lord still came through. Check out verses 21-23:

*There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.*

Ezra called for a fast because he was ashamed to ask the king for a security detail. Think about that... "God, I don't want to go to the king, so I will come to You. Help us. Protect us!..." Not the picture of faith that I expected. And still he did turn to the Lord and God did protect.

We are people of mixed motives and we don't always get to faith and trust in the Lord via a straight line. It seems God's concern is that we get there, the path apparently is less important than the destination.

Trust God... He will be there for You.

Think about it.

*Lord Jesus, I think back to the many times over my life You have showed up in wonderful ways. Sometimes in a surprise or miracle or a friend's words or a letter in the mail. I sit this morning in the quiet, delighting in the truth that You are with me and have been for years and years. I love You, Lord. And I am so blessed to be part of Your family. Amen.*

### **Saturday, September 6: Ezra 9- Facing our sin...**

Ezra the priest is confronted with a new issue. The people have not been faithful. They have married women of different faiths in direct disobedience to the Lord.

It is never easy to face our sin. Ezra has to do it and he will have to lead the people to do it as well.

It is Saturday night. Tomorrow is worship and as a first Sunday of the month, tomorrow will be communion too. And it is a good habit to spend time prior to worship facing myself honestly... taking time in self-examination and confession where my self-examination leads me.

*Search me and know me, Oh, God. See if there is any wickedness in me and purge the wickedness from me. I pray this, Lord, so that I might be an apt ambassador for You in all I say and all I do...*

*Through Jesus, my Lord, I pray. Amen.*

## **Sunday, September 7, 2014, 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](mailto:office@pcogonline.org).*

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.