

The Weekly Word
August 29-September 4, 2011

BOOO... summer is ending! YEAH...I love the Fall! There are always good things in life to find joy in, like reading God's Word. Thanks for reading along with me. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, August 29: Isaiah 4- Grace...

Isaiah 4 has one of those odd chapter breaks. Verse 1 continues the judgment image of the day of the Lord from Chapter 3. Then verse 2-6 paints the counter picture, God's blessing on the faithful.

God's blessings are spoken in language that Israel would immediately understand. God promised to provide them a land and to take care of it... so *the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel* (2). This is a picture of God's food and provision.

Verse 3 describes a people picked up and made new, given a new hope and future even as they are given a new identity.

Verse 4 speaks of cleansing, likely from sin and violence.

Verse 5 is reminiscent of God care of Israel when they were fleeing the Egyptians under Moses - *the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion ... a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy*. This speaks of God's protection, safety and presence.

Verse 6 seems straightforward. *It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain*. Shelter and protection.

I pondered all these images. For God's people, the day of the Lord will offer provision, a new hope, an identity and cleansing from the past along with protection and shelter moving forward. This is what God offers to those who remain faithful to Him.

I spent the remainder of my time pondering these promises of God and asking myself what I did to deserve all this.

And my only answer could be, I didn't deserve a thing, it is all by God's grace.

Thank You, Lord, for Your promises, Your provision, Your care, Your shelter amidst the storm... Thank You, Lord, for You. Amen.

Tuesday, August 30: Isaiah 5- From Woes to Grace...

After reading this chapter I had to go back and check. Yes, God was speaking to His people. He explains in verse 7 that the vineyard is a word-picture for Judah and Israel. *The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight*. But His people had fallen terribly, stuck in the mire of selfishness and sin. The verse continues, *And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress*.

As the chapter moves on, God confronts the depravity within His people Israel through a series of woes.

11-12: *Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets,*

tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands.

18: Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes,

20-23: Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.

Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent.

And what do these judgments reap? Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets (25).

I sat with all this before me and shook my head. These were supposed to be God's people, God's beloved, the ones who knew God's ways, who pledged obedience to God and who supposedly loved God with heart, soul, mind and strength. What happened that they lived like this? How could they fall so far from the Lord?

The next thing I knew. My thoughts shifted. If it could happen to them, it can happen again to those of us who follow God today. If I am not careful, I can pervert God's ways and find myself as far from God as Israel did.

This sad word of ancient judgment became a warning to me....be vigilant in my faith, to stick close to God's Word, to listen to God's Word as best as I can without the adulterating lens of my culture.

A second thought hit me. Grace is a wonderful gift. My words cannot express the wonder of God's grace in my life and in the Scripture, particularly the NT. But I can so easily abuse grace and turn it into a license to sin and disregard God's Ways... another warning sounded.

So I sat with God wondering; examining my life and the Christian community that surrounds and nurtures me. Am I, are we, FAITHFUL. Capital letters FAITHFUL?!?

O, God, give me honest eyes to see myself and my faith community for who I am (we are). Now give me the courage and strength to change and move toward ever increasing faithfulness. In Jesus' name I pray. AMEN.

Wednesday, August 31: Isaiah 6- God's Call...

One of the most captivating individual calls in all of the Scripture is Isaiah. Although Isaiah already began revealing prophecies God has given him (chapters 1-5), he now inserts the story of God's call in his life.

For me this is one of the most compelling chapters in the whole of the Bible. The imagery, the simplicity, the total surrender by Isaiah and the difficulty of his particular call, speak to me every time I read it.

Isaiah's response, "*Here I am, send me!*" grips me every time.

O, Lord, I long to have that kind of absolute surrender to You that Isaiah had.

Isaiah knows nothing of the particulars, only that God has called him. There is no bartering, no fleece, not even any questions... just obedience, plain and simple. "*Here I am, send me!*"

This morning I found myself attentive to what comes after Isaiah's response. Isaiah asks, "*For how long, O Lord?*" And God answers, 'until the cities are destroyed and the inhabitants scattered.'

Isaiah has a difficult call, he will prophesy a people in decline. Continued unfaithfulness will eventually reap God's judgment and Isaiah is called to be the spokesperson for God during these

years of decline and disobedience. Isaiah knows from the start that the people will not listen. In spite of this, Isaiah executes his call faithfully from start to finish.

O, Lord, I ask for the faith of Isaiah. Faith that immediately says, 'Yes, when ...

Thursday, September 1: Isaiah 7- Pretending to be godly

Ahaz, one of the despicable kings of Judah, is given an opportunity. God wants to do something to save Israel from an army coming against it. So God invites Ahaz to ask for a sign (11).

I am not one that believes we should go around asking God for signs to prove God is God. Gideon asked for a sign and God obliged but since the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, no Christ-follower in scripture asked for a sign. Instead, the Holy Spirit speaks and leads them.

Obviously this is an Old Testaments story and God, through His prophet, invites Ahaz to ask for a sign. But Ahaz, in a mocking tone, refuses, *"I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test"* (12).

This may sound pious but understand Ahaz has thrown God out of the temple and has begun worshipping false gods. He is not pious but mocking.

My thoughts spun. Do I ever use pious sounding talk to avoid God? Or do I ever act piously on the outside yet selfishly on the inside. In other words, do I ever pretend to be faith-filled?

I suspect that most reading this are no where near as despicable as Ahaz, one of the most faithless kings in Israel's history. But I find it spiritually helpful to regularly examine myself to see if any seeds of faithlessness are growing within. This is what I find myself doing this morning as a result of this reading.

Maybe God is calling you to a time of self-examination as well. Think about it.

Lord, it seems that You have me on a self-examination trail lately. Opening myself up to Your gaze and scrutiny. Go deep my Lord, that I might live faithfully before You. Root out all sin and wickedness within me, that I might grow in holiness even as You are perfectly holy. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, September 2: Isaiah 8- In whom do you trust?

We have already read that Isaiah will have a hard word to bring to the people of God. This chapter's message fits that bill.

Verses 6-7 capture God's indictment and judgment of His people. Verse 6 is the indictment: *Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah.* God's message: you have rejected Me (Shiloah was a place of God's presence) and turned toward other people for your safety.

And God's judgment: *therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River-- the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks,* what they feared will happen. They will be overrun by a foreign king (Assyria). Rezin and Remaliah will not be able to save them.

These verses raise the issue of whom we trust. Do I (you) trust in other people or human institutions like government or do we trust in God?

Being honest it is much easier to pose that question than to answer it. I'd like to believe I trust God but it is impossible for me to take people and human institutions totally out of the equation. After all, I pay attention to my retirement investments. I try to be a good steward of the resources God has given me, so I have a measure of trust in banks and the banking system. I am

trusting that the government will keep social security solvent. Again, this shows a measure of trust in the government.

Does this mean I am not trusting in God? I don't believe so. But honestly, I must remain vigilant about my faith and trust in the Lord. It is all too easy to fall into trusting people and institutions instead of trusting in the Lord.

This is certainly worth some spiritual contemplation...

Lord, thank you for the mind You have given me. Help me, Lord, to use it to glorify You and to work and live in ways that honor You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Saturday, September 3: Isaiah 9- Consequences...

I cannot read verses 6&7 without thinking about Christmas and the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. What a gift God bestowed on humankind! Jesus, the way of salvation, the Lord of glory, who gave His life for mine and all people.

And yet, the wonderful words of life and hope and salvation in verses 6&7 are a future promise from God. However, in the present moment, God's anger rages against these stubborn and rebellious people. Such is the message of 8-21.

Processing all of this, I realize that although God is loving and gracious toward us, God doesn't take sin lightly. Sin has consequences and we must not take God's graciousness for granted. If I am living in sin and rejecting God calls to repent and return, then I should not expect to get off scot-free.

I need to think about this some more...

Lord, tomorrow at worship we will celebrate communion. The bread and the cup are reminders of Jesus' life and blood given so that we can live. Lord, I am reminded of Peter, when asked on Pentecost what must we do to be saved, replied that people must repent and be baptized. Baptism signified that they believed and worshipped Jesus as Lord... Thank You, Lord God, for Jesus, the Way of Salvation... Amen.

Sunday, September 4, 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.