

The Weekly Word

December 26, 2011- January 1, 2012

Where does a year go? I pray you have a blessed week, sandwiched between Christmas and New Years. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, December 26: Matthew 27- Dead...

The glories of Christmas still ring in my ears and wonderful carols still waft through my home and yet, I sit today reading of Jesus' torture and death. Today's reading ends with the lifeless body of Jesus lying cold and still in a guarded tomb. Jesus is dead!

How can beauty turn to ashes so quickly?

I celebrated gold, frankincense, myrrh and homage to the babe yesterday and today I read of Jesus' pitied death.

Yesterday I celebrated what angels sang at His birth and today ugly crowds called for Barabbas, instead of Jesus, They hurled insults at Jesus as He hung dying for their sins.

Life is anything but steady state, emotions and situations fluctuate broadly. Up one moment, down the next...

Through it all Jesus is there... always present. One moment He sat on His rightful throne in heaven, the next He was a seed planted in the womb of Mary. And yet there was not one single moment that He was not Lord of All.

The wonder of the faith is that this Lord of glory became a man so that He might teach us the way of God and then die in our place so that we could be restored to a vital and living relationship with God ... Alleluia!

Lord Jesus, thank You for saving me... for all You did so that I (we) could be saved... Thank You for the marvel of Your incarnation and Your sacrificial death... Thank You. Amen.

Tuesday, December 27: Matthew 28- Jesus is alive...

Jesus came not only to die but to be raised to life again, a witness to all who believe that we, too, will be raised to life again!

I noticed an intriguing aspect of the story. After the women found the tomb empty and spoke with the angels, they headed back to tell the disciples. As they were walking back, Matthew tells us, *Jesus met them* (9). I found it interesting that Jesus found them; Jesus met them. Could it be that Jesus intentionally sought them and met them? What I saw in those three words from the text is that Jesus made sure He found the women. And even more, after greeting them, He told them, *Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me* (10). Jesus was making sure He met up with the others as well.

After the separation of death, Jesus made sure He reconnected with His disciples.

I thought...that's Jesus. He meets us in our bewilderment, in our hardships, in our pain. He pursues us. Jesus didn't simply speak platitudes when he said, *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (20).

In the Old Testament God says to Joshua *As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you* (Joshua 1:5).

We serve a God who pursues and who stays with us... no matter what.

I spent a few minutes thinking about how God has been with me throughout my life, through thick and thin, and now I just want to thank Him. Psalm 121 comes to mind, my prayer for today.

I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore Amen. (Psalm 121:1-8)

A word about Jeremiah

Jeremiah, sent to Judah, was God's last prophet to Judah, before their exile. The people of Judah had become hopelessly attached to Idols and immorality, so God through Jeremiah sent the message that if the people repented God would spare them from Babylon. Jeremiah preached this message for 40 years, but the people didn't listen to him. The result of Judah's repeated sin the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon and the exile of all Judah's people.

Wednesday, December 28: Jeremiah 1 -Before you were born...

I found myself attracted to Jeremiah's call, simply stated in two verses.

*The word of the LORD came to me, saying,
"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (4-5)*

I sat pondering those words...

God knew ('knew' carries the idea of choosing, calling, setting apart) Jeremiah before. That statement takes a bit of effort to get one's head around. Jeremiah was known, chosen, called, set apart before he was even formed in the womb. I was known, 'chosen', before I was formed in the womb. You were known... before you were formed in the womb. Wow! I wish I could say that I fully understand that but it stretches my thoughts. I can and do affirm it. I believe it because it is in God's Word, but it stretches me.

Oh, the glory of God, the wonder of God as Creator...

Jeremiah's call goes on to say, *before you were born I set you apart*. My mind is stretched again.

Before he was born, breathed a breath, said a word, thought a thought, God had set him apart for his great calling!

I flash from Jeremiah to myself. The major part of me relishes that my life is totally in God's hands. His sovereignty controls my day and the day. Yet, there is a small part of me that says, what about 'free will'? Do I have a choice in all this? And even if I don't personalize this to myself, the same thoughts circle regarding Jeremiah. Did he have a choice in this, what about his 'free will' and so on?

For the umpteenth time, I find myself bowing to and submitting to God's absolute sovereignty. Though I don't fully comprehend it and even though it wrecks havoc with some of

my thinking about free will and choices and ... I say, 'Alleluia the Lord reigns'. He is God and I am not! And I choose to submit to His will and His way and His calling in my life.

Great and mighty is the Lord, He formed me and I am His. I am a sheep of His pasture. Lord, I will listen for Your voice and I will follow where You lead. I will go where You send me and do what You have for me to do. I bow and surrender to Your will and I do so out of love for You and wonder at Your mighty name. In and through Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Thursday, December 29: Jeremiah 2- Are you walking with the Lord

A scathing rebuke of Israel, that's chapter two. From opening to closing, Chapter two is God's indictment against Israel. They have run after other gods. There is not one positive word spoken to Israel in this chapter. Not one!

As 2011 draws to a close, I find myself reflecting on the year past and thinking about the year ahead. God's rebuke of Israel causes me to review my life foundations. I have not run after other gods... as least as completely and recklessly as Israel. But I have dallied. There are chinks in my faithfulness and areas of my life where I have not surrendered, where I listen to and follow other voices than the Lord.

My food for thought today... I don't want to become an Israel, faithless and pursuing other gods. Self-examination and confession are my only defense...

Lord, if there be any wickedness in me, search it out and destroy it. Discipline me as needed so that my life might shine for You, my life might point to You, my words sing of You.

I pray this in the name of the One who rescued me and who ransomed me with His own blood.... Jesus, the king of glory. In His name powered by the Holy Spirit, I pray. Amen.

Friday, December 30: Jeremiah 3- Watch your example

In verses 6-10 God spoke of Israel's (the northern kingdom) unfaithfulness and how Judah (the southern kingdom) watched and then committed similar sins and adulteries. Two times, in fact, God references Israel's example impacting Judah. Both times it was a negative impact. Judah watched Israel sin and followed suit.

I mused about one's example. It seems so easy, so natural, so human, to transfer negative, God-dishonoring qualities to others... my children and those close to me in particular. I sit here under the weight of my sin, realizing that in addition to dirtying my life, it has touched and influenced others negatively as well.

God, I don't understand why it seems so easy to influence someone negatively and so hard to influence them for good. That doesn't seem fair?!

And as I thought about this I saw again the depravity of the human heart. We are (I am) sin-filled and corrupt...

Lord God, the only answer is the atoning work of Jesus and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Only then can my sins be forgiven and I can have the strength and ability to live for You, O God.

Thank You, Jesus, for saving me. Holy Spirit, fill me, use me, transform me to be more and more like Jesus every passing day of my life...

To You -Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever. Amen

Saturday, December 31: Jeremiah 4- A sad day...

This is a sobering chapter to read to close out 2011. It is a word about impending judgment. Judah's life of sin and rebellion against the Lord is coming due. The prospects are not good, and yet God holds out one last call to repentance. One final opportunity to return to the Lord before the fury of the Lord is turned loose.

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done-- burn with no one to quench it (4).

There is an honesty and soberness in these words that are not pleasant but are true. As I face the closing of 2011 and stand at the dawn of 2012, my sense is that this same type of soberness and honesty is a smart posture for me to take as I look over my life. I need to take a few minutes today and tomorrow to examine my life lived and my trajectory moving forward.

I don't think I am in the desperate 'last chance' position that Judah is in... and yet I must be vigilant to keep my life headed toward God. It is all too easy to veer off to the right or left. Judah at one point was walking with the Lord and then she veered away from God. She dabbled here and there with foreign gods. Today's final call comes because she refused to humble herself earlier.

Spending some time in sober, honest evaluation of last year and the spiritual trajectory of my life as I head into 2012..... will God's grace allow me to avoid Judah's fate?

Time for me to pray and talk with the Lord...

Father, Son and Holy Spirit... how am I doing? Please show me my areas of weakness and sin that I may correct my ways and run after You.

Father, son and Holy Spirit, show me the ways I have grown, that I may rejoice as a disciple who is learning and maturing as I follow my rabbi.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as I look to 2012, I offer that year to You. Lead me and guide me where You will. Use me to proclaim the name of Jesus near and far. I pray that my life will point people to You and will bring honor and glory to Your name. That Your kingdom will increase through my labors as I follow Your will and way in 2011. In Jesus' name and through the power of the Holy Spirit, I pray. Amen.

Sunday, January 1, 2012, Sunday Worship – New Years Day

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.