

The Weekly Word
January 1-7, 2018

Happy NEW YEAR. May the Lord meet you in every page of the Bible you read! Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, January 1: 1Chronicles 1- People...

Lists of people... people I would never have paid any mind to.

How many people do I see and interact with everyday who I pay no attention to? Hundreds, and probably more every week.

And even though I may give them no never mind, God knows who they are. And God knows where they have been and where they are going. God knows the intimate details of their lives as well as what makes them tick.

God values them. God sent Jesus to die and atone for them. God delights when they join His family. God loves them.

I am wondering why I give some many people little or no attention. I realize I cannot get to know or befriend everyone who crosses my path but those I interact with I can treat with the dignity befitting a person whom God loves.

Every person has value in God's eyes and I need to learn from the Lord and treat everyone with the dignity that her/his humanity deserves.

As I embark upon this New Year, I am sensing that God is knocking on my heart, reminding me my manner of treating others needs to be improved this year...

Oh, God, I will need Your help. I can be so busy, so self-absorbed in the things I am doing that I look past people You place in my life... some for just a moment or two, others for much more significant amounts of time. Lord, teach me to value others as You value them. Teach me to love like You love. This is a big prayer, Lord, but it is not too big for You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, January 2: 1Chronicles 2- Bad deeds cling like leprosy ...

Another chapter of names... not the most spiritual of Bible readings for me.☺ When I come to chapters like this, one discipline and devotion to the Lord, who saw fit to include this chapter in sacred Scripture, keep me reading and call me to attention.

And my attention focused on two pieces of the chapter. One, most of the names are listed with little embellishment, even David who would become the archetype king for all Israel is only mentioned by his name David. But strangely Achar is listed, naming also his evil deeds. *The son of Karmi: Achar, who brought trouble on Israel by violating the ban on taking devoted things* (7). Bad deeds have a habit of attaching themselves to us. They cling like leprosy and never let go.

Pondering this raises my appreciation for the Lord. As David says in Psalm 103: *as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us* (12). God's gift of forgiveness is more than I can fathom... what an incredible gift God offers us through faith in Jesus.

My second thought emerged from the concept that heredity is important to keep your lineage alive and fresh for generations to come. For the Jews in exile, stripped from the land, maintaining their heritage and bloodline was important, far more important than it is for me. And far more important than it is for people 'in Christ.' In Christ every conversion creates a direct descendant of the Father. I don't have to be the son of x, y, or z to prove my inheritance. I am directly an heir with Jesus through faith in Jesus.

Again I am so appreciating the gift of God that comes to me and all who believe in Jesus. He is my rock and stay!

Lord, to be bound directly to You is such a gift. I don't need to prove a blood lineage. I don't need intermediary priests. I have direct access to You, Lord God Almighty, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. And it is in You and Your saving grace that I delight. Praise be to You, Oh God. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, January 3: 1Chronicles 3- Remember, relive, retell...

When life is hard, when you feel displaced or are displaced, like the Israelites who have been carried off to Babylon, roots and history are an important anchor. The Chronicler begins his history of Israel tracing their roots. He began with Adam and has carried their lineage down toward the present. Today he traces the root line of David, God's chosen king for Israel.

While on paper this chapter is another list of names I can barely pronounce, however for Israel languishing in Babylon these names connect the people to God. For good or for ill these men charted Israel's course through the centuries.

These names are reminders of God's covenant.

For me the great reminder of God's covenant is the cross. A human instrument of extreme torture has become for me the most wonderful symbol of love, forgiveness and redemption. And the fact that this horrific human instrument of pain can itself be reinterpreted to be a symbol for God, speaks of God's ability to redeem. If God can re-make a ghastly instrument of torture into a symbol of love, then God can take a broken human life and recreate us, bringing life to death and joy from mourning.

Seeing Israel cling to her history, even in exile, spurs me to on to cling to Jesus. Israel reminds me to recount my history and to recall the many ways God has worked and is working in my life. Remembering God's story, retelling God's story and reliving God's story strengthens my faith to live for Him every day...

My heart begins to sing...

Jesus... Jesus... Jesus... what a wonderful name...

Praise You Father, Jesus, Spirit. Praise You, my God, three yet One. I thank You for the line of faith that traveled from person to person depositing a love for You in my life. I pray that I may live faithfully so that others would be blessed to know Jesus through my life and the life of those people You have allowed me to strengthen and encourage in Jesus along the road of life. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, January 4: 1Chronicles 4- Where do I fit; what do I do?...

As I read this list of names, yet another list of names, I had the nagging question, "Where do I fit?" For the Israelites it was important for the people to be able to account for their lineage. What is your ancestral line? Not only did this establish your right to be considered part of God's family, it also delineated where you fit in. Clans had particular areas of the country designated as their territory and this by the nature of the land affected occupations. And when it comes to Levites –not listed in this chapter –your lineage also determined your function.

While that system worked in the ancient world and for Israel at the time, I 'feel' the constraints which that system imposes. Some of my feelings are certainly due to my living in the 'modern' age and western culture where for the most part individuals choose their path.

A second aspect of my thoughts is generated by the New Testament where God doles out His gifts, not based on lineage but by His calling (see 1 Corinthians 12:4&11). This is not the same as the individualism of the modern western world, because I do not get to choose my gifts and callings, God does... so I am not captain of my own life but servant seeking to do the will of my God and Father.

My time with the Lord spins at this point, as I consider if I am serving my God and Lord well, using my gifts to serve His purposes and advance His reign in the world.

The Lord has saved and called me and gifted me for a purpose... to do the good works He has prepared in advance for me to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Am I serving Him well and faithfully? This is the question that is burning into my soul and heart this morning... Am I serving the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit well and faithfully?

Oh, God, I pray so. I pray so... in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, January 5: - 1Chronicles 5- ...

The writer continues telling the story of Israel through the lineage of the 12 tribes. And today we read, regarding some of the tribes that *they were unfaithful to the God of their ancestors and prostituted themselves to the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria (that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria), who took the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh into exile...* (25-26).

As Israel remembers her history, she remembers the bad as well as the good.

The Old Testament, which traces the story of God's people Israel through millennia, doesn't shy away from telling the seedy and sorted parts of their history. They remember the things that they as a people did wrong as well as what they did right.

It is shocking at times to read the Old Testament because of the stories of Israel's failures. How can these people be God's people? But they were.

Israel falls often and the Lord, who is patient and kind, would send a prophet or someone in an attempt bring them back to the truth. And when judgment was required God sent the hard judgment as He did by sending Tiglath-Pileser.

This is a reminder to me that so day, on a day of God choosing, He will again judge. But the coming judgment will not only be for His people, it will be for all people.

Unrepented sin will be judged.

I don't like to think about this or face the fact that sin has consequences. I don't think anyone does. We want to skate by and slip in. And many, if not most of us, think the 'other guy' is worse than we are so when life is graded on a curve we will be 'ok'.

But, sadly, that is not the story of the Bible. Scripture reminds us over and over again that sin carries a penalty that we will all have to pay.

Unfortunately, we cannot pay our penalty... it is too costly. Thankfully Jesus paid the penalty for everyone who puts their trust and faith in Him.

So even as I consider the weight of my sin, I can also rejoice in the forgiveness and salvation faith in Jesus has brought to me.

Thank You, Lord. Thank You, Jesus, for Your gift of mercy and salvation. Thank You for opening my eyes to Your truth and for giving me the faith to believe... I praise You, Lord. What else could I do for the one who loves and saves me?

In Your name Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Saturday, January 6: - 1Chronicles 6...

Levites held a special place in the community of Israel. They were the keepers of the temple and its rituals. Priests, musicians, temple servants, this was their calling and their inheritance from the Lord. As such they received some particular cities spread throughout Israel, but they didn't receive a specific territory, because temple service was their inheritance.

Essentially this chapter delineates the Levites. The first part of the chapter is a list of names, a genealogy of the various Levite branches, with virtually no comment. The last portion of the chapter details the towns given to the Levites.

In terms of inspiration, it is a duty read for me.

However for people recalling their heritage during a time of national exile and crisis, I can understand the importance of listing the families important to the maintenance of their religious practices, because upon their return to their land the ritual life of Israel will have to be reestablished.

How hard it must be to maintain your religious identity when you cannot take part in the necessary rituals and sacrifices.

I am so blessed that that is not an issue for those of us in Christ. First Jesus has promised to be with us to the very end of the age (See Matthew 28:20). Also faith in Jesus, though aided by rituals and celebrations handed down throughout the centuries, is not dependent upon any particular ritual performed by a particular class or clan of people. Spiritual connection and spiritual depth can be found in any place or time because God lives in those who follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit is given to all who are disciples of Jesus (Romans 8:x, Ephesians 1:x).

What a blessing, what a gift.

As I sit on the eve of worship I look forward to my time with my church family tomorrow, but I know that if I were separated from them I would not be separated from the Lord because He is with me and His Spirit is in me. Alleluia.

Lord, what a blessing and joy it is to be Your son. I melt into Your arms right now and praise you for the love, care and presence You provide to me, every moment of every day.

I know I don't always recognize Your care and presence, but it is there and I am grateful.

Praise be to You –Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Amen and amen.

Sunday, January 7, 2018, 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.