

The Weekly Word
February 11-17, 2019

Happy Valentine's week. Remember God loves you! Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, February 11: Luke 8- What yield is my life producing?...

I found myself musing over the parable of the sower and its explanation. First the parable itself:

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear" (5-8).

Now the explanation:

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop" (11-15).

Reading the explanation I got to wondering if the seed among thorns people are 'saved' but they just don't mature into fruitful believers. In our family garden sometimes things we plant don't fully mature but are still edible. Last year we planted what we hoped would be onions... but they never matured and we ended up with a crop of scallions.

As I looked back at the parable, the clear indication is that only the good soil seeds produced a bountiful crop, indicating they alone are the 'saved' ones. This pushed me to realize that I was over thinking the parable. I mean Jesus' clear intention is that the super yield of the good-soil seed is the point of the story.

As I pondered the parable more I began to realize that I was superimposing my 21st century biases onto the text. Jesus never equates salvation with getting to heaven. Eternal life is part of salvation for certain, but salvation affects how we live in this world and producing fruit is the demonstration of our faith this side of eternity.

This thought/realization begs the question... How is my fruit producing going? Am I producing kingdom fruit? Are you?

Think about it.

Lord, may your Word nourish my soul and my life so that I produce a 100-fold bountiful crop. In Jesus' name and for the sake of the Gospel's advance I pray. Amen

An additional thought from verses 38-39: *The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and **tell how much God***

has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town **how much Jesus had done for him**. Sometimes people say the Gospels don’t say Jesus is God. The more I read them the more I see Jesus’ divinity. Notice the bolded words in the above. Told to say how much God did for him, the healed man proclaims Jesus. This is a clear yet subtle explanation by Luke that Jesus is God.

Tuesday, February 12: Luke 9- The punch of Jesus’ call...

I am temped often, probably too often, to lighten the blow of the call to follow Jesus. He is not a man calling followers to a Carnival cruise; He is a recruiter enlisting people in the army. The words He spoke at the conclusion of this chapter pressed me to think about the challenges of Jesus’ call to follow Him.

*As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has **no place to lay his head**.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “**Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.**” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” Jesus replied, “**No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God**” (57-62)*

No place to lay His head... The call of Jesus doesn’t mean luxury or even necessarily stability in this life. It could mean a life of movement and even wandering. It could mean giving up of all normal creature comforts in order to be faithful. If we are going to follow Jesus we, too, may not have a place to lay our heads. I don’t normally think of this as a possibility of discipleship... but there it is.

The call of discipleship could cause us to miss some of those important life moments. Particularly in eras past, missionaries left families behind to go and serve Jesus on the frontiers. There was a time when they shipped their belongings to their new land of service in a coffin knowing that death was the only way they would make it back home.

The call of Jesus asks us to not look back on the life we could have had. We are forward looking people... looking forward to serving Jesus and His kingdom.

None of these make me feel particularly comfortable as I contemplate them.

Part of me wonders, why I have had it so easy? Am I truly faithful? How come I haven’t had to pay these costs? This last question makes me wonder if I have avoided some of Jesus’ calls because they are too costly. In other words, have I played it safe with my faith, wanting the ‘good things of this life’ even as I profess to follow Jesus?

I can be harsh toward myself in quiet moments?

I also wonder maybe Jesus knows I couldn’t handle these and He is just being kind to me. If so, it could only be grace...

Lord, speak to me as I ponder these hard questions. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, February 13: Luke 10- Lambs among wolves...

Much in this chapter is familiar, sending of the 72, Good Samaritan parable, Martha and Mary. I had a sense that I should meditate on something less familiar. I reviewed the chapter a second time and verse 3 struck me. *Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.*

Part of the sending of the 72 story, it was a feature I tend to glance over, even sometimes miss. An internal nudge seems to say, "Ponder here."

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. This is not marching instructions that would cause many to volunteer. Is there any wonder that *the workers are few* (2)? Jesus is sending us out on a difficult assignment. The likelihood of rejection is high (10-16). I suspect that the rejection alluded to in these verses is not merely emotional rejection. History has borne out the fact that with rejection often comes suffering, persecution and even death. Remember what rejecters did to Jesus!

Then there are demonic forces and demons to contend with. Yes, the 72 were victorious, but I just don't know if we are to assume that those battles with evil were easily won.

I fueled my meditation by researching how wolves hunt. A few things I learned.

- They hunt in packs with different animals playing different parts. Faster animals regularly herd the prey so it can't escape, while stronger animals do the killing.
- Wolves may track a herd for days, spying out the weaker more vulnerable animals before they choose to attack.
- A major strategy is to separate one animal from the herd.
- Wolves can be opportunistic. If while spying a herd they may target a vulnerable animal but as the hunt begins should a larger animal accidentally stumble and fall, the pack will seize the moment, turn from the vulnerable animal to attack the unfortunate larger animal that fell.
- Wolves often hunt at night when a herd is less-suspecting, tired and where surprise is an ally.
- Pack mentality of wolves helps keep them safer from predators.

Overlaying these on Jesus' statement pushes my ponderings...

- As a lamb, I am most vulnerable when I am exhausted and particularly when I am separated from other lambs. Maintaining my connection with other believers and keeping my life in balance will help me as an ambassador for Jesus.
- As a lamb, I need to be vigilant recognizing that the devil is always prowling looking to devour God's people.
- Growing toward maturity will help safeguard me when enemy attacks come.

The task of extending the Gospel should never be viewed as easy. It will be difficult and it is fought with dangers. But I mustn't lose sight of the end of the story:

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (17-20).

There is joy and victory in serving the King and God will keep us eternally safe. Live or die in spreading the Gospel *our names are written in heaven.*

Lord, thank You for this rich morning with You. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.

Thursday, February 14: Luke 11- Teach me to pray...

One of the few things the disciples asked of Jesus was to be taught to pray. *One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach*

us to pray, just as John taught his disciples” (1). His answer was the prayer we call “The Lord’s Prayer.’ Luke’s version is a bit tighter than Matthew’s. It goes like this:

“ ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation’ ” (2b-4).

Father... no descriptors, simply a name, invocation. “Father” is a natural title a child would use to address her father. So Jesus teaches us to address God as we might address our parent, our dad.

First petition... blessing God for who He is (*hallowed be your name*), then invoking and inviting the coming of God’s rule and reign here in our world.

Second petition... the present need we have to live. This is an ongoing reoccurring prayer. *Give us each day our daily bread.* Notice ‘each day’. One of the main things we need from God is our daily provision.

Third petition... forgiveness. We continually sin and are in need of forgiveness! I am always troubled by the attached line, *for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.* I can’t imagine Jesus means to model that if we don’t forgive, God won’t forgive us. But then again maybe. One thing is certain; this second clause of this petition is a call to us to become forgiving people, just like our God is a forgiving God.

Petition four, steer us clear of temptation... As I listen to this petition I realize that it requires that we are actually listening for God’s leading. I cannot pray this petition seriously without being ready to hear God’s voice speaking to me.

Jesus gives a powerful and practical teaching on prayer. Now will I carve out the time necessary to practice and master the gift of prayer, the gift of access to the God of heaven and earth?

Lord, I follow the disciples request with one of my own. Lord, give me an ever increasing desire to pray... In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Friday, February 15: Luke 12- Watch your life closely...

Hypocrisy caught my eye. Jesus is hard on the Pharisees suggesting that they (many anyway) apparently were hypocrites.

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs (1-3).

Hypocrisy is pretending to be someone you are not. Typically hypocrites present a better self than they truly are. There was a politician who exposed and championed ‘family values’, sadly he divorced two wives when they both were ill and needed a husband’s help and attention. That to me seems like an apt definition of hypocrisy.

Anyway Jesus’ warning goes on to say that those things we try to hide will be made known and words we say ‘in private’ will be announced. In other words what we try to hide will be seen.

It may be that our hidden actions/words will come out in this life. It may be that they will not be revealed until judgement day when we stand before the Lord who sees everything. Either way we will be found out! In other words our hypocrisies will be exposed.

So as I muse, Jesus is saying more than “Don’t be hypocritical.” He is giving us a good reason why we should not be hypocritical... we will be exposed for the fraud we are!

Teachings like this from Jesus always push me to examine myself. I am not perfect. Far from that! I am regularly tempted to present myself as something I am not. Embarrassment would flood over me if all my words and thoughts were broadcast on a screen behind me for all to see.

I have much maturity and growth needed in my life. This word from Jesus and words like it push me to live better. To lean into Him and seek His strength, wisdom, character as imperfect as I maybe...

How about you? Are you leaning into Jesus? Getting to know Him better and better, learning to live more and more like Him? This is our goal as disciples of Jesus.

Lord, help me to press into You. To grow more and more like You. I pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen

Saturday, February 16: Luke 13- Insensitivity and hypocrisy...

Aspects of the healing of the woman crippled for 18 years struck me, particularly how insensitive and arbitrary the synagogue leader was.

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”

The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing (10-17).

A wonderful merciful act of God occurred in their midst and this synagogue leader missed it completely, blinded by his hardening of the categories. How can you see a person dramatically healed after an 18-year bondage and the first thing you say is, *There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.* In essence he said, ‘You shouldn’t have healed on the Sabbath! Don’t heal on the Sabbath.’

Is miraculous healing the same as ‘doctoring’ on the Sabbath?

Is ‘doctoring’ on the Sabbath forbidden by God or just man’s interpretations of what God said?

The Law says no work... is what Jesus did ‘work’? It seems like the religious leaders pushed God’s laws into territory beyond its intended meaning.

Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of his statement pointing out that this man unties his donkey and leads it to water on the Sabbath... isn’t that working????!!!

I am constantly amazed how insensitive we humans can be. Like this synagogue leader, when we forget to put ourselves into the shoes of others, we can say things that are hurtful. I wondered how the woman felt when the leader condemned Jesus for healing her, while also saying that she shouldn’t have come to seek healing on the Sabbath. First, we don’t know that she came to the service just to be healed by Jesus. And even if she did, she has been bound by this infirmity for 18 years! Who in that situation wouldn’t seek healing?

If we would only take a moment and attempt to climb into the other person's shoes before we speak, some of our insensitivity could be averted.

The Holy Spirit is convicting me that I need to think more before I speak... reminding me that I, too, have spoken insensitively to others and wrongly about God.

Lord, I reach out for Your forgiveness, mercy and grace. I need it badly... Amen.

Sunday, February 17, 2019, 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 LivingHopeCT.org website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

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