

The Weekly Word
February 18-24, 2019

As February nears its end, we are closing in on the end of Luke. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, February 18: Luke 14- Big important questions...

In the conservative/evangelical wing of the Christian faith we like to emphasize that the Gospel is the free gift of God. We can't earn it nor pay for it. And I absolutely believe this is all true. Problem is that mentality can be pushed too far suggesting faith requires no responsibility.

One thing is certain, you cannot go to that extreme if you listen to Jesus. He never ducks from presenting the responsibilities, as in today's chapter when He talks of the cost of being a disciple.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple (26).

Hate is a strong word... Jesus says we must *hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life* if we want to be a true disciple. Is He being literal? Probably not, but His point is clear. Nothing, not father, mother, wife, children siblings, not even self can come before our LOVE for God and our DISCIPLESHIP of Jesus. Nothing can come before our following of Jesus!

That is a strong statement. Jesus doesn't mince words. And He doesn't soften the call of discipleship either.

I am afraid that I fall so far short of this call of Jesus. I wonder sometimes if I have truly taken discipleship seriously!!

The weight of Jesus' Words sits upon my shoulders... pressing down upon me. Am I living up to Jesus' call? Am I following Him closely? Am I His and His alone? Do I allow myself, others and desires get in the way of my following of Him? Big questions. Important questions.

O God, the questions flood... am I faithful? Lord, my spirit is willing but my flesh is weak. Strengthen me, O God. Strengthen me... Amen and amen.

Tuesday, February 19: Luke 15- What was Jesus' appeal?...

I love chapter 15; the three parables of this chapter grab me, especially the parable of the Prodigal Son. Some of my favorite sermons are from this chapter.

As I began reading, immediately the opening sentence called to me. *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus* (1, NIV2011). The idea that all these people were being drawn to Jesus enticed me to ponder. The way Jesus lived and taught beckoned people to Him, especially sinners who were rejected by pious Judaism. I thought it might be interesting to read the verse in other translations, to see what nuances might emerge.

ESV: *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.*

The Message: *By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently.*

All three translations confirm that the people were coming to Him. Call them tax collectors and sinners or as Eugene Petersen put it in 'The Message', people of 'doubtful reputation.' The

folks coming to Jesus were people who had been looked past by the religious establishment as being unfit or unsavory.

Something about Jesus, the way He taught and His acceptance of anyone who would come listen, drew these people who were otherwise rejected by the religious establishment.

I find it fascinating that Jesus never compromised His message of God, and still people flocked to him.

I wondered, how Jesus connected with these people. Too often we, who have conservative or orthodox faith-beliefs, do not connect people who are of 'doubtful reputation.' What is it about Jesus?

All I can do to try and answer this question is to ponder Jesus as His life shines through the Gospels.

- He was consistent, loving and caring for everyone no matter his or her station in life.
- In fact it seems at times that He went out of is way to connect with people of lower stations and doubtful reputation.
- He spoke God's truth, yet always in a loving manner. One exception were His harsh words reserved for hypocritical religious leaders.

There are more lessons, I am sure. But these offer a start to understanding Jesus' appeal. And these traits are available for me and others to emulate.

Thank You, Lord God, for this gentle reminder about attitude and living for me as a Christ follower. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, February 20: Luke 16- Stay open...

The closing line of the chapter is the final comment on the story of the rich man and Lazarus, *'If they [the rich man's brothers] do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'* " (31).

Recalling that Jesus is speaking with a Jewish audience for whom Moses and the Prophets represents God's Holy Word, Jesus is saying, if people have their hearts closed to God's Word no miracle, even a most spectacular one, will not change their mind.

Two thoughts flip flop as I ponder...

One, if a person's heart is not open at least a crack to the Lord then a miracle, no matter its veracity or magnitude, will land on a stony heart. People can dismiss anything, even when there are compelling facts. How much more miracles, which can defy explanation. Some people do not believe the USA landed a man on the moon, despite the facts. If you have that kind of attitude toward faith, someone rising from the dead will not likely move your faith meter! If you are open to God breaking into this world a miracle will encourage your faith.

Two, miracles confirm what we believe but rarely produce faith on their own...

As I continue to consider... God is saying to me, "mind your heart." "Keep your heart, mind and soul open to Me and My Word. When You attend to this, I will reveal Myself to you in ways that will surprise you"!

Amen, Lord. Amen. As I sit with Your Word open on my lap, keep my heart tender. Massage out the knots and stony parts through Your Spirit. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, February 21: Luke 17- BE thankful...

Ten lepers are healed, only one returns to thank Jesus, and this man was a foreigner, a Samaritan. *One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan* (15-16).

The point of this encounter seems pretty obvious, be thankful and express your thanks to the Lord for the things He has done for you!

I don't know that there is much for me to mine in this text. What I need to do is to put it into practice and be thankful for the things God has done for me...

So I sat, remembered and gave thanks to God for the myriad of blessings that I have experienced from Him.

Thank You, Lord...

PS: I chose not to write out my thankfulness. I just didn't feel right about writing a list in this blog; it felt like boasting. I did, however, speak my thanks directly to the Lord.

Friday, February 22: Luke 18- Children and Jesus...

I read and reread and scanned this chapter for a serious amount of time. Nothing particular drew me to deep meditation. I set it down and came back to it after an interlude to enjoy a snack. Still nothing concrete.

As a new grandpa I opted to consider the little children story.

People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (15-17).

I can understand people wanting to bring their children to Jesus. In a world where infant mortality was an unfortunate reality, having a man of God hold and bless your child is a no-brainer. It certainly can't hurt and it probably can help!

Why the apostles chased the parents with children away is not told in the account. A plausible factor could have something to do with children being unimportant. Whatever the motivation, Jesus would have none of it. He turns and calls the children to Himself.

Then he seized a teaching moment. *Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.* Not only are children invited to Him, but also we all have to become like a child to enter the kingdom of God.

Vulnerable, dependent, trusting are three words that come to mind when I think of a child. Certainly these are character traits of a faithful Christ follower and maybe part of what Jesus was attempting to say to His followers.

How am I doing in those three areas? How about you?

Pause and consider before you set the Word down today...

Lord, grace me with the ability to look realistically at who I am and how I am doing as a disciple of Yours. Show me areas of growth and then give me the fortitude to seek Your help to grow. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, February 23: Luke 19- Zacchaeus...

I thought I might consider the story of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus fascinates me. He is a wealthy tax collector, not someone I would normally think would be attracted to a religious leader. As a

Jew fellow Jews likely considered him a traitor for working for the Roman government. It is very easy for me to view him as a man who had written off religion and faith long ago.

His interest in Jesus suggests otherwise and his fervor to see Jesus suggests something is burning within him. I don't think curiosity alone would possess a man of this stature to climb a tree to see Jesus.

Beyond his wildest dreams, Jesus spies him and invites himself to Zacchaeus' home!

In response Zacchaeus pledges to give half his wealth to the poor. Plus, if he cheated anyone he would make restitution of four times the amount. This comes across as a voluntary act of thanks and appreciation for Jesus acknowledging him and coming to his home.

Zacchaeus' actions are a concrete thank you if ever there was one!

Sometimes all people need to make a step of faith is an act of kindness, recognition and an invitation.

I wish I knew what God had been doing in Zacchaeus' life leading up to the meeting of Jesus. I know, as I look back on my life, God had been working many angles in my life, which unbeknownst to me prepared me to receive God's message of love and forgiveness when it was spoken to me by my friend Karl. It seems so easy and effortless for Zacchaeus to make the step of faith into belief. Likely it was, but only because God was at work tilling the soil of his life to receive the 'life seed' of the Gospel.

Since I believe God is constantly working in the hearts and lives of disciples, I find myself wondering what God is doing in my life today and when He will use His workings now to move me in a new or different faith direction in the future. Whatever that may be, I hope and pray that I am like Zacchaeus, willing to jump in with both feet when God make the invitation.

Lord, keep working on my heart, soul, mind and strength... so that whenever You ask something of me, I am ready to obey. I pray this in Jesus' name and for the sake of the advancement of the Gospel. Amen and amen.

Sunday, February 24, 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 Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

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