

The Weekly Word

April 1-7, 2019

It is April... and April showers bring May flowers. Spring is coming!!! May the Lord bless you as you grow in His Word. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, April 1: Acts 26-Citizenship transfer...

I found myself pausing a number of times with a thought spawned by words from the text. So many places to ponder.

I decided that verse 17-18 would be my primary inspiration for today's meditation. This is a portion of Jesus' Word to Paul on the road to Damascus. *I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and **turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God**, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*

It was the words that I bolded that sparked my attention. Paul uses two images to describe what occurs when a person puts her or his faith in Jesus. At the moment of genuine faith in Jesus a person turns *from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God*.

It was the second image that really caught my eye. At salvation a person turns *from the power of Satan to God*. I don't often think of salvation as the moving from Satan's sphere to God's sphere. What a powerful picture. And one that connects perfectly with what Paul says in Colossians 1:13-14: *For he [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

At the moment of salvation God transfers us from dominion or power of Satan into God's dominion, the kingdom of Jesus.

Too often I think of salvation only in human terms, like becoming God's son or being forgiven and receiving mercy. These are absolutely true, but they are not the entire story. There is also a citizenship transfer. Once we confess Jesus as our Lord, we no longer answer to Satan. Satan's grip is released and we are now bound to the Father.

What a jaw-dropping message.

What a powerful spiritual reality.

Satan no longer has a hold on me... I am God's possession and I live in God's kingdom.

Thanks be to God for His gift of adoption and kingdom transfer.

Only You, Jesus, could rescue a sinner like me. Thank You and bless You. In Your name Jesus I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, April 2: Acts 27- God speaks...

This chapter is basically the travel log of a harrowing adventure. Paul's journey to Rome was a difficult one. Still I wondered, "God, is there a word to nourish me? If so, show me. Speak to me."

In the midst of this storm God spoke to Paul. *Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'* So keep up

your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island” (23-26).

I understand that Paul’s situation was highly specific. Paul, an apostle, was being sent by God to Rome. I cannot equate my life with Paul in any way, shape, or form other than we are both disciples of Jesus.

Even though our lives are very different, I drew great comfort that God spoke to him during the storm.

God speaks... God speaks during the good times and the bad times!

I have never had an angel announce something to me from God. Still I know the blessing of God speaking and leading. And this reminder gives me great comfort today.

God speaks. God leads. God directs His children. This brings me joy!!!

Lord, I am so glad that You speak. I know Your voice. I have been blessed by Your leading and I love you, Lord. I love You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, April 3: Acts 28- Hard work and painful witness...

Today we come to the end of the book of Acts with Paul under house arrest awaiting trial before Caesar, preaching the Gospel to all who will listen. *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!* (30-31).

Only Holy Spirit imagination allows us to surmise what Paul might have said when he stood before the leaders in Rome.

The Gospel is going forth *to the ends of the earth* as Jesus said before he went up to heaven (see Acts 1:8).

As I reflect over the book of Acts, God has fulfilled His Word and sent His people to the ends of the earth with the message of Jesus. At times there have been dramatic events that propelled the Gospel. But most of the story of the early believers is not anything I would have expected. Their story is filled with problems, riots, arrests, imprisonments. While it is ‘fun’ to recall the dynamic moments of miracles, there are more stories that call for hard work and ‘painful’ witness.

The headline believers in the book of Acts suffered and persevered for Jesus and God used them. Many who came to faith through their preaching also understood that suffering was part of the call.

This humbles me. I want faith in Jesus to be easy. I want faith in Jesus to be dramatic and miraculous. I don’t necessarily want faith to cost... but it will. Peter, Paul and the others of Acts remind me of this. *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!*

Am I truly committed to discipleship and the advancement of God’s Gospel to the ends of the earth? Am I??

Lord Jesus, I pray for strength, strength to labor on... no matter what You will bring my way. Lord, I pray for strength, strength to soldier on... we are in a battle. The ultimate victory is Yours, but there will be many casualties of Your people along the way.

I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Thursday, April 4: Micah 1- Who/what is influencing me?...

Things are not good when God sends a prophet to confront you. Such is the situation for the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah represented by their capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem. *The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it, that the Sovereign LORD may bear witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple (1-2).*

God is going to speak and His words target Samaria and Jerusalem, but His words are for all, faithful and not; *Hear, you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it...*

This got me thinking. God has given His Word and we, His people, need to pay attention to it. But God's Word is universal, in that its truths apply to all people whether they believe it or not. People following other religions and people with humanist philosophies may not believe the Bible, but someday they will learn that God spoke His truth. So while they may not follow the Bible at this time they will be judged by God's Word in the end.

The Bible, God's Word, is for all but I cannot make anyone put their trust in God and His Word. That is their own decision.

As I continued reading I came to verse 9: *For Samaria's plague is incurable; it has spread to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself.* Reading this verse I thought about the power of influence, in this case, negative influence.

Samaria, the northern kingdom, ten of Israel's original 12 tribes split off from Jerusalem after Solomon. They immediately spiraled down into apostasy, setting up counterfeit religious practices that mirrored the practices God gave and they became a snare for Jerusalem/Judah. They influenced Judah away from the Lord...

For the second time this morning I ran with a thought. Who is influencing me? Who am I listening to? Who has my ear? And just as importantly, are they leading me toward or away from Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit?

First, I have to admit that people influence me. After facing this, I can begin to weigh those influencing me based on if they influence me toward good and God or toward self and sin.

This takes conscience thought...

I have today's 'assignment.' ☺

Lord, help me to see beneath the surface, to see who influences me and the trajectory of their influence. Lord, also show me, me. Reveal what connections and parts of me resonate with You and which resonate with sin. Finally, Lord, help me to confess any and all sin that surfaces to You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, April 5: Micah 2- Listening to the wrong voices...

Israel, the northern kingdom, wandered so long from the Lord that they no longer know how to discern God's voice and distinguish God's Words from those of false gods and false prophets.

"Do not prophesy," their prophets say. "Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us." You descendants of Jacob, should it be said, "Does the LORD become impatient? Does he do such things?" "Do not my words do good to the one whose ways are upright? ... If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' that would be just the prophet for this people! (6-8A, 11).

Discerning right from wrong, God's voice from the inner voice of self or our culture's voice, is a life long struggle and a daily struggle. Every day voices clamor for our attention. Advertisers want us to buy their products. Politicians speak and rally to draw us to their view of things. Various segments of society rally and protest to get their voice heard... in the hopes of

persuading people to their opinions. News outlets slant their coverage of events to fit their narrative. TV and movies present their personal views on all manner of subjects. And we would be naive to think that these various voices are not trying to win the majority to their point of view.

As we read Micah, one realizes that Judah has been won over by voices other than the Lord's. It is to the point that they reject God's prophets preferring those who will tell them good things they want to hear (even though these 'good things' are not representative of God's voice to Judah).

What is a disciple of Jesus to do in our day and age to combat all the voices flooding our ears?

First and foremost we must stay in tune with the Lord. His voice, His word, His decrees must, and I repeat **MUST**, be the foundation for the various decisions we make and the views we hold. Once we venture off the secure foundation of God's Word, we have entered a land full of quicksand. Seemingly safe pathways are littered with views and opinions that can suck us in and lead us from God's revealed positions and will. And the only way I know of to stay in tune with the Lord is to continue to listen to His Word. I have to regularly and repeatedly tune into God's word to counter act all the other voices I am hearing from my world.

Reading the Bible and pondering it

Listening to the Bible and soaking in it.

Memorizing it (which I am neither good at nor faithful at)

These seem to be tried and true ways to stay tuned into the Lord that have worked for God's people for centuries.

May they be true for me...

Lord, show me margin in my life where I can carve out time to invest in Your Word. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, April 6: Micah 3- Justice...

Three times the word justice appears in this chapter. Twice the leaders of Jacob are confronted and condemned for their lack of justice. One time Micah says, *But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin* (8).

Justice is a big deal for God. The Lord expects His people to be people who are just, who root out injustice and fight for justice.

What does this mean for me and for us living today? What does it mean to fight for justice in the 21st century USA? I know we are not a theocracy like ancient Israel was supposed to be. And if Israel teaches us anything, it is that people do not live up to God's ideals, ever. But we still should try... that's the call God has placed upon us.

It is clear from what Micah says, that one aspect of justice is to treat people as they deserve; not to take advantage of others even when we can. Often the powerful and the wealthy take advantage of the poor and downtrodden. This should not be in God's house. This is one thing that the leaders of Jacob are being taken to task for...

Another injustice is building one's life on bloodshed, bribery and the like. Dealing with one another should honor that we are all human beings and deserve respect for that.

How do I bring this into my world???

I am sitting here pondering my last question. It is not a simple easy answer. Some aspects are straightforward... treating others honestly and fairly, and things like that... but what about the

way society treats others? What about the way people use power and influence and trickery to get their way? Am I to speak to that? Should the church speak to that, to those outside the church? I'm not sure the church does a good job speaking to justice within the church...

Lord, help me. I want to live for You and represent You and Your faith well with my life. Holy Spirit, lead and guide me. Give me strength to follow especially when I do not 'want' to follow and obey. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, April 7, 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.