

The Weekly Word
May 14-20, 2018

As spring comes to life, may God's Word bring your soul and heart to life. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, May 14: Job 28- A tidal wave of awe...

The NIV labels this chapter "Interlude: Where Wisdom is Found." My initial thoughts were about the origin of the words in this chapter. What is their source? Are they God's insertion into the text? How do they fit with the narrative?

I quickly realized my trying to figure this out, thoughts walled off my soul from hearing the text. I became mind-dominant rather than heart-dominant as I read.

I continued to read, interested in where this interlude was leading. It led straight to the culminating and final verse of the chapter.

And he said to the human race, "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding" (28).

This phrase and similar ones are the bedrock of the Bible's wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes). 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' is an often repeated refrain of wisdom books.

Here it is the crescendo of this interlude in slightly altered wording, *The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding*"

So what, I pondered, is *the fear of the Lord*? There probably is an element of actual fear I mused. God is absolute and could squash us in a nano-second. As I roll this thought around, while it is true, a deepened sense from my reading of Scripture is that quaking fear is not God's intent. Over and over He restrains for the sake of mercy grace and love.

So, fear is much more than quaking in our boots before God. It is also awe, reverence, and a deep respect. Words fail me. 'Awe' is the audible gasp of one who comes into the presence of perfect beauty, love, power and strength...

Living in perpetual awe of the One who created all things, yes, I can see how that is wisdom. Oh, that fear of God like that would guide me every moment, waking and sleeping.

My thoughts roll, a natural outcome of fear/awe would be to *shun evil*.

This leads me to the second half of the line, which in wisdom literature is often a restating of the first in an alternate manner. Thus *to shun evil is understanding*. Yes, to fear God would cause me to shun evil as I just noted.

I return to thoughts of being in the presence of perfect beauty, love, power and strength... I feel my heart beating faster. I gather a physical inkling of what it might be like to be in the PRESENCE of God.

I can only enter this place because of Jesus... utter perfection would destroy my sin-filled humanity were it not for Jesus, who beckons me to enter in... to be with my God and enjoy His presence. To enjoy Him...

All I can do, Lord, is *praise You* and revel in Your gift of presence

I sit still and bask...

Amen.

Tuesday, May 15: Job 29- Living in the present...

Job's final rebuttal goes on for 3 chapters. I need to note this because today's words are only one-third of his speech, the first act of his 3-Act soliloquy.

Job begins by lamenting the loss of his past. His is a dramatic loss. Once, the venerable sage of the community, people looked up to him and hung on his every word. Now he is discarded to the dung heap. He is forgotten and worse, despised.

Although there is truly no comparison, Job's life is shattered by disaster. As I age I long for some of the years gone by when my body did things it no longer does. A few weeks ago we had a work day at our church, spring cleaning the yard after winter. As we were setting up one fellow who is in his mid 60s commented to me, "You know I just can't work like I used to. I used to be able to keep going and work all day. Now I get tired and some days after a long morning of work I take a nap in the afternoon."

I responded, "Yeah, I can't work as fast and long as I used to either."

Some days gone by can never be retrieved. And while we can miss those years, if we live looking back, we miss the God reflections in our present time.

I get that my thoughts today push beyond the natural boundaries of Job's words. Still I linger. Talking with the Lord about my present life and the ways I can appreciate things rather than long for some other era/period in my own life.

Living in the present and making the most of it... this is what God asks of us.

I find myself thanking the Lord for the opportunity to live... to live for Him.

Oh, Lord, I need your strength and your power to be a difference maker for Jesus. To affect the world for good and for You, help me, Holy Spirit, to follow Your lead. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, May 16: Job 30- Am I like Job's friends?...

One of the saddest chapters in the book. It's closing words groan in my head. *I go about blackened, but not by the sun; I stand up in the assembly and cry for help. I have become a brother of jackals, a companion of owls. My skin grows black and peels; my body burns with fever. My lyre is tuned to mourning, and my pipe to the sound of wailing* (28-31).

Weary, lonely words... *I stand up in the assembly and cry for help.* The inferred answer, none came and probably even worse... mocking, embarrassment, exclusion.

Job is an outcast, tossed to the debris pile by those who once honored him.

And why? Because of assumed sin. People had to impute to his tragedy some personal blame. If they didn't, why would they not simply help as they could?

I am wondering if I do that sometimes? If I refuse help because I have imputed some wrong, some 'they are getting their just desserts' to the pain and tragedy of the person-in-need's life? Do I construct these thoughts to exonerate myself from the need to offer brotherly help? Do I marinate these thoughts so that I feel better about myself?

I don't know... but I have to probe and look and examine. Because that is faithfulness, to be honest with oneself and see faults that need to be surrendered to the Lord.

Is there a seed of Job's friends in me? This really is the question the text presses upon me today. Is there a seed of Job's friends in me?

Oh, Lord, search me and know me, see if there is wickedness in me. Forgive me and restore me to the joy of Your salvation. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, May 17: Job 31- Innocence?!?...

Job makes a case for his innocence to friends, but mostly to the Lord. The implicit understanding is that if I am innocent then the trials I am enduring would cease. The trials are seen as punishment for sin.

Surely poor sin-filled decisions sometimes cause us pain, but not always. One cannot set up an equation, good living = blessed living. Not all sin reaps pain in this side of eternity.

Job expected vindication from the Lord for all his clean living.

Oh, God, I know that I cannot possibly live up to and satisfy Your law perfectly. Oh, God, every day I realize this and the burden of failure is great. Thank You, Jesus, for love, mercy, forgiveness, care, presence and all manner of other great gifts that You bestow. Thank You and bless You, Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

Friday, May 18: Job 32- Open to God's wisdom...

A new voice enters the mix. Apparently Elihu has been seated quietly listening to the two sides spar. And Elihu is not impressed with either side; he is especially disappointed in the friends because they couldn't refute Job.

This chapter was Elihu's justification that he, a younger man, could now speak. In the middle of his opening I found some words to chew on.

But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right (8-9).

The truth of these words project off the page. I have beheld this first hand. I have met younger ones who are wise and older ones who are foolish and everything in between. It is particularly delightful when age and wisdom combine... spiritual wisdom, wisdom of years, and years of maturity are a beautiful sight.

But as Elihu says, it is the *breath of the Almighty* that gives understanding and wisdom. SO what can we do to gain understanding and wisdom born of the *breath of the Almighty*?

On the one hand it is gift... God gives as He wills. But on the other we can place ourselves in the best place and frame of mind to be open to God's wisdom. It is here that I ponder. What can I do to place myself in the best stead to receive God's wisdom and understanding?

Hmmm... I can seek it, humbly seek it. And what does this mean?

- 1) Remembering our place; God is God and we are not. We sit at God's feet listening and learning.
- 2) Paying attention to what God has spoken. Reading and studying God's Word, the Bible, to understand not only its content, but its author, the Lord God Almighty.
- 3) Conforming ourselves to the will and way God presents in His Word. This is certainly tied in with #1 but in my mind moves beyond #1. This is more than a matter of the heart (humility), it is conformity—recognizing God's way as the correct way and bowing to it.
- 4) Giving time and attention. Absorbing God's wisdom and understanding takes effort over time. As human beings we are not naturally bent toward God. Instead we are rebellious and sin-filled. It takes time to reshape and re-bend us toward conformity with God. True wisdom is not simply a matter of mastering facts it is integrating it into our personal lives and letting it take root. Only then can we dispense it with a sense of humility and integrity.

Lord, help me to grow to be a man of Your wisdom and understanding. I pray for consistency to do my part as I seek the breath of Your Spirit. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, May 19: Job 33- The burden of needing perfection...

As Elihu continues, I struggled to find my devotional nugget. I find I have grown weary of all these words. People pouring it on Job trying to get him to admit he is at fault. He is the reason all this bad has befallen him.

People are so caught up in having Job admit he had done something wrong so that the tragedies of his life can be chalked up to God's punishment of wrongdoing.

Is life a scorecard of behavior? If so there is no room for grace or mercy because they would upset the order of things.

Does God speak to us through trials and tragedy, certainly God can and does do this. God speaks in many ways. But to set up some kind of absolute equation seems to disregard many variables of life. Earthquakes, tsunamis and natural disasters signal God's punishment upon everyone affected? Malaria, small pox, Ebola, cholera also signal God's just punishment on all who contract these diseases? When life is good this is a great theology to hold. When life turns sour this theology is a condemning weight for one's shoulders to bear.

So I weary of all this banter back and forth. I long instead for the Savior who says, *Come to me all you who labor and are weary, and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light* (Matthew 11:28-30). I long for the Savior who says, "I died for you. I forgive you. I love you."

My soul longs to drink from the fountain of grace and mercy. I weary from the burden of the need for perfection.

Oh, Jesus, come, breathe life into my soul. Breathe Your life giving Spirit into me that my heart may be raised to You in joy and adoration. In Your name Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Sunday, May 20, 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.