

The Weekly Word
October 22-28, 2018

Isaiah is rich and full. I hope reading this book is blessing you as it is me. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, October 22: Isaiah 36- When trials come your way...

Hezekiah was one of the premier and faithful kings in Judah in the Old Testament. He loved the Lord and led well. Then in the 14th year of his reign, the entire region was attacked by Sennacherib, King of Assyria. And during that time the Assyrian army laid siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah had some advanced warning during which time he fortified the walls and dug an amazing channel to bring fresh water from a spring outside the city wall into the city. At the same time he covered and hid the spring.

Hezekiah was no fool, he did everything he could to prepare for invasion. In time the mighty Assyrian army came and besieged the city. Even with the strengthened city, Judah was no match for Assyria, the dominant world power of the region.

Stuff happens I thought. Hezekiah prepared as best he could, still prospects looked grim.

With the siege came the taunting... *Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you! Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, 'The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' "Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then each of you will eat fruit from your own vine and fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own—a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. "Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, 'The LORD will deliver us.' Have the gods of any nations ever delivered their lands from the hand of the king of Assyria? (13-18).*

Hezekiah kept his focus on the Lord and he kept the people looking to the Lord as well.

I thought, Lord, there is my devotional nugget for today. Keep my focus on the Lord.

- When the skies are dark and cloudy... keep my focus on the Lord.
- When life is sunny and good... keep my focus on the Lord.
- When people are down and distraught around me... keep my focus on the Lord.
- When I am tired and exhausted with too much to do or the strain and stress of life... keep my focus on the Lord.
- When I feel like giving up... keep my focus on the Lord.

Be a Hezekiah, a man of faith, a man of follow-through.

Oh, Lord, give me the strength to keep my focus on You, Lord, at all times, in all seasons until I close my eyes in death. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, October 23: Isaiah 37- Powerful and effective prayer...

Today we read Hezekiah's response to the threats of the king of Assyria. Immediately Hezekiah *tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD* (1).

Hezekiah went to be with his Lord and he abased himself before God. Humbled, Hezekiah knew he was in trouble and that he didn't have power or strength to oppose Assyria's King on his own. His first impulse was to go to the Lord. Many times in Israel's history, when faced with a sizable foe, they turned to other kings and other countries for protection. Egypt was a favorite 'helper.' Hezekiah understood that God, the Lord, was his only true protector.

I pondered Hezekiah's prayer: "*LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.*

"It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are the only God" (16-20).

This prayer is 117 words long. The average conversational speaking rate is 110-150 words per minute, so Hezekiah's prayer took about 1 minute. Sometimes we think that we need to inundate God with our prayers and words. And while there are times to spend significant time with the Lord in praying, speaking and listening, we need not do that all the time or with every need.

Hezekiah prayed a powerful and effective prayer in a minute.

Looking over his prayer, Hezekiah begins by honoring and hallowing the Lord. Then he states the issue as he sees it, Sennacherib ridiculed God with his boasts. Interestingly Hezekiah's heart pounded with God's honor above his safety. Honestly, that probably would not have been my prayer... I suspect I would have been frightened for my safety.

Hezekiah next acknowledges the might of Assyria, but quickly calls on God to defend them, which he absolutely believes God can do. Faith in the Lord is my second observation. Utter faith in God.

After all this pondering I am brought to a similar place as yesterday. Be a Hezekiah, a man of faith, a man of pray and trust in the Lord.

Oh, Lord, give me the strength to keep my focus on You, Lord, at all times, in all seasons. Help me grow as a man of prayer, prayer that honors You and has supreme faith in You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, October 24: Isaiah 38- Death knocking at the door...

As I read this chapter I wonder how a faithful man like Hezekiah can fear death so much. I have seen this in life as well. God loving, faithful people, brothers or sisters in Christ, scared to death of death. Being there with folks in those moments, often I find that some misbelief is at the root of fear.

As we read on we learn Hezekiah had some misbeliefs as well. For example, *For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness* (18). Death is not the end. Death is the doorway to life forever more for God's children, faithful followers of Jesus. Hezekiah didn't understand this. Apparently he saw death as a pit –that imagery alone invites fear of death. He saw death as a separator from God, *those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness*. I would be frightened of that as well!

Thankfully the New Testament clarifies these wrong perceptions.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-16: *Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

1 Corinthians 15:51-52: *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*

I could turn to other verses. Hezekiah was mistaken, people who die in the Lord Jesus go to be with him and will live with God –Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit –forever in eternity. Check out Revelation 21 and 22 for more on that life.

I do not long for death. My desire is to serve the Lord for many years still. And when death comes, I pray that I can embrace it with the same faith I have lived life... absolute belief that my life is safe in Jesus' hands.

Lord God, I rededicate my remaining years to You and I look forward to eternity with You and all Your family from the entire span of time. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, October 25: Isaiah 39- Insulating ourselves from others pain...

I was surprised by Hezekiah's response that he would be glad the punishment would not happen during his lifetime. *"The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime"* (8).

It surprised me that Hezekiah didn't seem to care that Israel would be carried away to a foreign land.

His response made me realize how easy it is to get caught up in our own lives and futures and miss pain and suffering around us. I am not proud to say that I can insulate my life from the pain of others. I can be close-hearted and uncaring.

These thoughts are troubling me. Jesus seemed to be very present with people he met. Am I? I know I am not responsible to solve all the world's problems. The real question is. am I caring enough to help those in need?

Hezekiah seems self-focused, not caring about what would happen to some, even in his own family. This is not a good trait for a man who, up to now, has been highly faithful.

Even good people have weak spots... Hezekiah seems to display one in today's chapter. More importantly... am I learning about some of my own?

Lord God, I confess that I am imperfect and need much help, grace, and mercy. Forgive me for my selfishness, and help me to grow in honest love for brothers and sisters, particularly those in need. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Friday, October 26: Isaiah 40- All this for me and you...

I sit here awed by the wonder and scope of Isaiah 40. Like a grand holiday meal, there is far more in this chapter than I can possibly ingest in a single sitting. Where should I linger? What portion should I savor? I sit and am still...

I sense the chapter opening drawing me back. *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that*

her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins (1-2).

I substitute my name for Jerusalem and personalize these verses: *Comfort, comfort, my son, says your God. Speak tenderly to Bill, and proclaim to him that his hard service has been completed, that his sin has been paid for, and that he has received, from the LORD's hand, double for all his sins.*

Jesus has done all this for me. On the cross Jesus paid the price of my sins and then some. He offered far more than I could ever have paid. Honestly, how can you put a value on the life of God's one and only Son? If ever there truly was a priceless gift or item, it would be the gift of Jesus' life for my sins, for your sins, for the sins of the world. No matter the cumulative cost of human sin, the cost of Jesus' life is far greater.

God giving His life for me... that truth still staggers me.

Even as I contemplate the gift of Jesus and try to comprehend this gift of Jesus, I recognize that I am barely scratching the surface of this gift from Jesus. On that day when God says to me directly, "Your hard service has been paid for and your sins forgiven... come and enter My happiness" I will know even more fully the extent of Jesus' gift.

Oh, to sit and delight in God –Father, Jesus, Spirit. What a gift this morning with the Lord has been.

Oh, Jesus, thank You. Oh, Father, thank You. Oh, Holy Spirit, thank You. You are my light and salvation. I praise You and bless You for the comfort You give now and always... Through Jesus Christ, my Savior, I pray. Amen.

Saturday, October 27: Isaiah 41- ...

I found myself personalizing verses again today. This time 9-10: *I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand'.*

Certainly through Jesus, God has called people from across the globe and ushered them into His family. To His people as a collective and to each one of us, He has called us to be His servant. God has chosen me. I need not fear because God is with me. I don't need to be dismayed for the Lord is my God. When I am weak Jesus through the Spirit will strengthen me. Every day the Lord upholds me with His righteous right hand.

What a wonderful promise...

God is with me. He has reiterated this over and over again in the NT.

I sit today remembering and realizing that God is with me... I am His and He is mine!

Jesus, thank You for calling me and saving me. Thank You for providing everything I need to be Yours. It is only by Your grace that I am saved and adopted into the Father's family. Praise be to , Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Sunday, October 28, 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.