

The Weekly Word
Nov 12-18, 2018

With Thanksgiving on the near horizon, I am thankful that the Lord meets me everyday in His Word. I hope and pray He meets you as well. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, November 12: Isaiah 54- God's word moves people to action...

The word of God is alive... Isaiah 54:2 particularly the second half of verse 2, launched the modern day mission movement. William Carey, the father of modern missions, preached his world changing sermon from verse 2-3: *"Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.*

As F. W. Boreham writes*: **"At length, on May 31, 1792, Carey preached his great sermon, the sermon that gave rise to our modern missionary movement, the sermon that made history. It was at Nottingham. "Lengthen thy cords' — so ran the text — '*lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes, for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.*'"**

'Lengthen thy cords!' said the text.

'Strengthen thy stakes!' said the text.

'Expect great things from God!' said the preacher.

'Attempt great things for God!' said the preacher."

As a result of that sermon a mission society was formed and Carey offered himself to be its first missionary.

As I think about this, I am realizing anew the power of God's Word. If we will let it into our lives it will move us to action... action which blesses God by revealing the gospel message of Jesus to others. I am reminded of Jesus in His sermon on the mount: *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).*

We are salt and light. We are God's agents in the world that through our good deeds people will see God through us.

Lord, am I shining my light as brightly as You wish or am I hiding it under a bowl? Lead and direct me, Lord. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

* <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bcarey7.html>

Tuesday, November 13: Isaiah 55- God's life-giving presence...

The last few days for me have been emotionally tough for me; some insecurity and anxiety consumed a bunch of my thoughts and interrupted my sleep. I bared my soul with my wife last night and met with a trusted brother in Christ first thing this am. Both were healthy steps for me to take. Then I opened the Word for my time with the Lord. Oh my, did God show up. (It continually amazes me how often my standard Bible reading provides a perfect touch from the Lord. God is good.)

Right out of the gate these words greeted me: *Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.* Immediately I could feel stress washing off me. I came... and God provided what only God can, Himself.

A few moments later I read: *Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near* (6). Every day when I sit with my Bible open I am seeking the Lord. Not only was God found by me, it was like the Lord was standing there all along just waiting for me to glance His way!

And just a few verses later came these words: *As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, **so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it*** (9-11). More encouragement and more peace came to me.

I don't understand why I (we) go through times like I am going through, but God's ways are higher than mine. And His Word nourishes in tough times and good times. I am feeling nourished by the Lord and His Word this morning.

Finally the following verse 12a placed an exclamation mark on God's visit with me this morning. *You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace...*

Thank You, Lord. Bless You, Lord. You have given me exceedingly more than I could have asked for or imagined as I sat with You today. Halleluiah. Amen.

Wednesday, November 14: Isaiah 56- God cares for all people and so should I...

This chapter strikes a resonant cord with me. The opening reminds me that we should keep first things first. *This is what the LORD says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed* (1).

Maintain justice... it is so easy to devolve into life that is all about me. Me, me, me. I, I, I. To maintain justice means I have to lift my eyes from myself and scan the world. See what is happening and then do what I can to make sure everyone is being treated with fairness and justice. To maintain justice I have to look out for people who are looked past and looked over and do what I can to rectify situations and systems that are unjust.

This is not easy... to maintain justice I have to buck trends and swim upstream. In our world I have to be prepared to seem like an odd person who cares about others over self and/or over the advancement of certain privileged segments of society.

Maintain justice...

Then later in the chapter the prophet declares that God's arms are open to the eunuch. The eunuch was an imperfect person who was excluded from the house of God. Now the doors are open for the eunuch who keeps the Sabbath and covenant (4). And from this position of openness

Isaiah goes on to declare for God that *my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations* (8). This is a powerful statement and one that Jesus quotes in Mark 11:7.

As I ponder my reading I see a house of prayer for all nations connecting with maintaining justice... God cares for all... God loves all. And we, his people, need to work to see these values of God are fulfilled in this world to the best of our ability.

Lord, today help me to keep my eyes open for the needs of justice. If there are things I can do to advance justice, give me strength to do those things. Along with this, Lord, help me to willingly share Your love with all people, people from all nations and tribes and tongues to the best of my ability. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, November 15: Isaiah 57- Trusting God even when I do not understand ...

Two chapters ago we read that God's ways are higher than our ways. So true. So true.

As a pastor I have stood with families as they bury loved ones. So many questions. So many emotions. Often I have no absolute answers to give. Generally my best gift is my presence, simply being there.

Sometimes standing at the graveside of an older saint I have thought (but never uttered), "Their death may be for the best. The world is changing so rapidly and it was making them so uncomfortable." I have also wondered (again never voiced) that maybe it is best for a person with terminal or wasting illness to die rather than continue to linger and suffer. In these moments it is my lot to trust the Lord that He knows best.

Where did these musings come from? They were sparked by verses 1&2. *The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death* (1-2).

Hmmm... *no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.* Sometimes, apparently, God spares us future evil by taking us home to be with Him. This word brings me both comfort and questions... I find comfort that the Lord knows best and often His best is different (higher and better) than what I would hope for. Grief is difficult; we don't understand when the Lord takes someone as a way to spare them from evil.

Still even as I sit with these thoughts and Scriptures, I am seeing from a different angle that God's ways and thoughts are higher than mine and I may never be able to understand His ways. Sometimes my lot is to accept what God doles out, trusting God even when I do not understand.

Lord, I long to trust You. There is much I do not understand. Lead me to trust You in all circumstances, particularly when I do not understand. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, November 16: Isaiah 58- True fasting...

One of the profound pictures in all the Bible of a life God honors... *"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I* (6-9a).

Fasting can be a mere ritual. In fact, immediately prior to the above verses, Isaiah condemns Israel for ritualistic fasting without any soul humbling life change. Then to clarify true fasting God gives the above description.

I sit with God's description of His kind of fast staring at me, staring into me, staring through me...

Loose the chains of injustice.

Set oppressed free.

Share food with the hungry.

Provide shelter for the wanderer.

Clothe the naked and needy.

I could sum this up by saying love others as we love ourselves, but the global summary does not hit me as directly as the specific directives to loose, set free, share, provide and clothe.

Summary or long form, I fall so far short of God's ideal.

Sometimes I wonder if I am a hypocrite, professing faith but missing the mark, living selfishly rather than like the one put forward in God's Word today.

Lord, God, help me to come closer to the mark... to live more like the person You want me to be. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, November 17: Isaiah 59- A redeemer comes...

People want the blessings of God, immediate access and positive answers to all their prayers, but they don't want to live as God directs them to live. We want all the perks with none of the effort or requirements. I guess it could be called selfishness or hypocrisy.

The opening salvo of this chapter is striking... *Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things* (1-3).

Part of me wonders about grace... where is it? And part of me reacts to the vile nature of the people the Lord accuses through Isaiah's words. And these people are Israel, God's people, people who supposedly bow to and follow the Lord.

As I think about them... I find a slow turn happening. Am I guilty of similar actions, and if not actions, similar intention? Am I duplicitous when it comes to the Lord, professing one thing but living another way?

I read on. For a long time it gets no better. God mounts His case against them. Then in verse 20 God extends an olive branch—grace appears; grace is not lost and forgotten. *"The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the LORD.*

Come home... turn again to me... The story of the prodigal son lives. God says to them and to me (and to you), a redeemer will come to all who repent.

The redeemer is Jesus. He has come and He welcomes all who repent and turn to Him.

Alleluia. Thanks be to God for His abundant love and grace. He has not left me to wallow and die in my sin. He has saved me through the blood of Jesus. Alleluia. Amen.

Sunday, November 18, 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 Living Hope website you can send questions or requests 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.