

The Weekly Word

Nov 26- Dec2, 2018

May God's Word bless you this week after Thanksgiving. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, November 26: Isaiah 66- Humble and contrite in spirit...

My devotional nugget leapt from this chapter in verse 2b: *These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.*

Humble and contrite in spirit... Often it is the brash, big personalities that gain the press, get noticed and rise to the top. Reading a history about the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, Boss Tweed figures prominently in the politics. He was anything but humble and contrite in spirit.

Today it seems one has to make news to get things done. Big name, big voice, big personality... big results. And it was probably the same in Isaiah's day as well. With this as a background, God's delight in a *humble and contrite spirit* is quite a contrast. God's way is contrary to the way of the world.

It is not easy to find *humble and contrite spirited* role models in the world. So, I decided to ponder the life of Jesus and His apostles. Humble... doing what is right in God's eyes; giving glory to God rather than self; not promoting self but rather God's Good News; recognizing all is from God not self. These are a few attributes that come to mind.

Who tremble at my word... A fear/reverence for God and His Word. This suggests a desire to learn from and build one's life upon God's Word. An understanding that God's Word is true and right and profitable for learning and following.

Now I need to overlay these qualities on my life and ask myself questions...

- Who do I promote, more self or God?
- Am I willing to play second fiddle?
- Do I treat others with respect?
- Do I make room to study and apply God's Word to my life?
- Is the above a life pattern in me?

Oh, Lord God, I pray my life honors Yours. I pray to be a true and honorable son, who lives life in a manner that brings glory to You. Send Your Holy Spirit that I might be empowered to be Your agent in the world. In Jesus, my Lord and Savior's name, I pray. Amen

Tuesday, November 27: Matthew 1- Are you faithful...

Seeing that Matthew was next up in my Bible reading schedule gave me a spiritual lift. The gospels always excite and interest me. Reading Joseph's story started me thinking about how God leads and directs us. To the best of my knowledge, I have never been visited by an angel, but God has led me to and through some life altering changes. Engineering to pastoral calling, serving churches in rural and suburban, East coast and heartland America. I believe God orchestrated each change.

Learning to hear God's voice and follow it is a lifelong pursuit of a Christ-follower.

Joseph seeking to be a faithful Jew was set on divorcing Mary, his betrothed, quietly due to her indiscretion which resulted in her becoming pregnant. This was Joseph's plan until God intervened sending an angel to explain the details of Mary's pregnancy and to direct Joseph NOT to divorce Mary, see verses 20-23.

The next two verses were the ones that latched on to me. *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (24-25).*

Joseph's response was immediate; *he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him....*

That's the definition of a faithful man. God speaks and he obeys.

Immediately God questioned me... "Bill, are you faithful man, like Joseph? Are you?"

A time of honest appraisal ensued...

Oh, Lord God, grow me toward maturity and faithfulness on the order of Joseph. My parents gave me my middle name Joseph for Joseph father of Jesus. Help me, Oh God, to grow to be more like my namesake, a man faithful to Jesus. I pray this in the name of my Savior and Lord, Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday, November 28: Matthew 2- God's fingerprints...

All those details about Jesus. I marveled. Dating the birth with Herod's reign, the visit of Magi, Herod's plot to learn the 'new king's' identity, flight to safety in Egypt, killing of the children under two, return from Egypt and settling in Nazareth. During this chapter there were 3 mentioned angelic visits. And many of the happenings are fulfillments of prophecy and necessary for the protection of the baby Jesus.

Oh, the lengths God went to in order to protect Jesus.

As I typed the above sentence, I found myself considering the various lengths God went to in order to bring me to and lead me in my faith in Jesus.

I remembered a time in my early teen years where God answered a private prayer during worship that startled me and grabbed my attention. I thought about the young unnamed man who walked across a campus field to hand me a tract; I didn't look at it until I found it in my pocket after a friend shared Jesus with me. Then there was this friend who shared Jesus with me—a long but life changing story filled with God orchestrating crazy chain of events culminating with me rooming with this friend during an away football game. Attending Urbana Mission Convention (again another story with God's fingerprint all over it ☺). Then the Episcopal bishop asking me if I would consider seminary and pastoral ministry. And so my story goes...

God's fingerprints are everywhere. Oh, the lengths God went to bring me to and lead me in my faith in Jesus.

Why does God cares so much for me? Why God did this for me? I am overwhelmed by God's goodness.

Oh, Lord, I am forever grateful for Your love and providence in my life. I feel so blessed and I am in awe of You, Lord. I pledge my life anew to You. Through Jesus, my Lord, I pray. Amen

Thursday, November 29: Matthew 3- God working beneath the surface ...

I found myself pondering the arrival of John the Baptist, who shows up out of the blue.

First there is his name, John the Baptist. "The Baptist" is clearly a nickname or title that people of the day, and now history, have given to him. This moniker describes what he was

doing, baptizing people. How he came up with this idea and need for people to enter a time of confession is never stated. God was at work beneath the surface preparing for Jesus' arrival.

His message and his actions connected with the populous and riled up the religious leaders... a foretaste of and preparation for Jesus' ministry.

I found myself thinking about God working beneath the surface. Yesterday in my devotional time I recalled a number of 'fingerprints' of God in my life first leading me to faith in Jesus and then to a pastoral calling. God working beneath the surface.

Today I received an email from a pastor friend. He recently retired and moved to a town in Iowa. I don't recall all of the reasons for choosing that town. His email was a prayer request. This weekend he is meeting with a small church whose pastor dropped dead of a heart attack last week and my friend is being considered for an interim pastor, a position he has filled elsewhere. His closing line goes like this: Maybe the Lord was keeping me available for my next adventure. We'll see. I'm not desperate, so I won't be devastated if God closes this door or a better "someone else" is chosen. Again, I see God working beneath the surface.

I marvel at the 'unseen' moves of God that advance His gospel work.

Sometimes I wonder where and how God is moving beneath the surface now. Generally, I don't 'find out' until God has opened some door. Then as God leads me through the door, I see some of how God worked to open that door even as He prepared me to enter the door.

I am certain of this, God is working 'beneath the surface' all over the world advancing His gospel, I raising up men and women to do the work of sharing the good news of Jesus.

Am I open to God's next adventure for me? I hope and pray so...

Lord, I lay myself before You. Use me as You will... as 'a preparer' like John the Baptist or as 'a goer and doer' like Peter and Paul. I am Yours, gratefully and excitedly Yours. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Friday, November 30: Matthew 4- Three words...

Three words spoken to Simon and Andrew. Three words changed their lives. Three words, "*Come follow me...*" (19). Oh, there were more words spoken for sure to that pair of brothers, but it was those three words that changed everything for them.

"Come follow me..."

And Jesus has continued to issue that same invitation to men and women in every corner of the globe.

Karl, as an ambassador and spokesman for Jesus, issued that invitation to me in October of 1975. I replied, "Yes." And my life was forever and immeasurably changed for the good. Following Jesus was the most radical decision I have ever made and the most important. I began a journey that will continue throughout eternity.

I am so grateful to Jesus and that he employed a friend to invite me. I am so honored that Jesus has enlisted me to invite others...

"Come follow me..." Those words changed my life, too. And as I hear Jesus speaking them to Andrew and Simon I am reminded about his invitation to me. And like Simon and Andrew, I am so glad that I decided to drop what I was doing and follow Jesus.

Today as memories flood my thoughts I am grateful for my Savior and everyone in my life that had a hand in me saying "Yes, I will follow you."

Thank You, Jesus, for finding me and for inviting me to follow You. The privilege has been mine every step of the way. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, December 1: Matthew 5- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God....

A little nudge in me said, spend time with verse 8. So after reading the chapter I returned to verse 8 and allowed it time to soak into me.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Pure in heart... I looked up the definition of the Greek word for pure: physical, religious, and moral cleanness or purity in such senses as clean, free from stains or shame, and free from adulteration.**

So the bar is pretty high for being pure, still it is descriptive rather than legislative. Pure in heart seems then to be the person who keeps her or himself clean before God. Their heart –the seat of will and emotion– is clean before God. I realize that legislatively this is impossible. Any sin ruins purity. But the Beatitudes aren't law as much as they are descriptive. So 'pure in heart' describes the person seeking after God whole-heartedly. I suspect that King David, described as a 'man after God's own heart' (see Acts 13:22), would be considered 'pure in heart' even though the Bible details a number of significant sins in David's life.

Pure in heart... seeking God, honoring God, living for God with intention, desire and determination.

What do the 'pure in heart' receive? They get to see God. That is a high honor. Even Moses, the premier man of the OT, was not allowed to see God. To see God is to die; still this honor is granted the pure in heart. What a gift. Unfathomable joy to see God here, now in this life.

Oh, that before I die, I might mature to a purity of heart that I see God before I meet my God in eternity. Praise be to You, Lord God, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Amen and amen.

**Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume.

Sunday, December 2, 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 Community Church 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.