

The Weekly Word
August 13-19, 2018

I cannot believe August is half over. Summer will soon be fall. The flow of life continues. I pray the flow of God's word strengthens you. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, August 13: Acts 4- Barnabas...

Nicknames don't always define who we are. Sometimes they grow out of an incident in our lives. I love giving my family members nicknames, which change over time.

Other times nicknames do express an aspect of who we are, like William the Conqueror, the first Norman king of England 1066.

I love the nickname given to Joseph, the Levite from Cyprus. According to verse 36 the apostles called him Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. What a great nickname. And he certainly lived up to that name. In verse 36 he is giving money to support people in need in the church. In a little while he will come alongside of Saul (Paul) and work with him on his first missionary journey (chapter 13). Later he gives Mark a second chance after he bailed on Barnabas and Paul during the first missionary journey (15:36). Only the Lord knows if there were others he encouraged along the way.

Paul and Mark are important figures in the early church. Together they wrote about 30% of the New Testament. As I think about this I wonder if we would have had Paul and Mark without Barnabas first encouraging them to walk in their faith???

I'll never know the answer to this question. Still it causes me to ask if I am encouraging younger members of the faith. Am I a Barnabas for others? Are you?

I know that my faith has been strengthened because of the encouragement of others. Karl, Harry, and Jeff are 3 men who have been a Barnabas for me at important times in my life.

Lord, please point out to me some men for whom I can be a Barnabas. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Tuesday, August 14: Acts 5- Ananias and Sapphire ...

There is no doubt that the account of Ananias and Sapphire is a strange story. Why would Luke under the inspiration of God include this story in the New Testament? I don't know the mind of the Lord... still there is much in this passage.

For starters, I turn to the end, to see what message Luke is sending through this account. Verse 11 is the wrap-up. *Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.* Whatever I learn from this passage, one thing is for certain, God is to be feared. God is supreme.

We talk about how God knows everything. For Ananias and Sapphire this is no longer an abstract truth. They found out the hard way, when they lied to the church and to God.

Already my thoughts are percolating... since God knows everything, God knows when I have lied, taken credit for things I don't deserve, and tried to hide bad things I have done. Their fate could have been mine! A measure of fear sets in...

I wonder what it must have been like for Peter to be given the revelation and then watched those two from the flock drop dead? One thing I respect with Peter is his honesty in delivering

the word God had given him. At least for me confronting others does not come easily. And I have never had such a dire word!

I circle back to the fear of God. Do I give God the honor reserved only for God? Have I become so 'familiar' with God that I have lost appropriate 'fear' of God?

This account stirs up yearning in me... yearnings to know God more and more fully as life marches on.

I sit quietly before You Lord. Show Yourself to me... I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Wednesday, August 15: Acts 6- Pressure to conform...

Including today's reading, pressure on the church is ratcheting up. In chapters 4 & 5 apostles are arrested and marched before the Sanhedrin. Now in today's reading Stephen is arrested. Stephen is a non-apostle as well as a Greek speaking Jew. Living in Jerusalem he likely knew Aramaic as well.

The Sanhedrin seems to be going on the offensive and the suggestion of trumped up charges show that they are willing to break rules to break this new movement. This caused me to think that the world –possibly fueled by Satan's designs against the church –doesn't play fair when it comes to trying to shut down the church and the advance of God's gospel.

The pages of history are littered with Christ-followers enduring various levels of persecution for their faith. Recently I told the story of Jim Elliot martyred with 4 others in 1956 trying to advance the gospel in Ecuador. A friend of mine attends the home church of Andrew Brunson a missionary being held in a Turkish prison. She regularly sends out updates. Friends in Nigeria regularly face varying degrees of persecution.

As the USA culture grows more and more secular traditional Christian believes are being viewed more and more frequently as intolerant. I can't say we are persecuted but I am feeling marginalized. I wonder if that might tilt more aggressive?

Pressure on the church to conform is ever present in every society.

I am reminded of Chapter 4 when the church in the face of first imprisonment prayed for more boldness (see Acts 4:29-30). Oh that I would pray for the same... Oh that we –the church universal –would pray for more boldness especially in the face of threats and persecution. Boldness to witness to Jesus, not our political agenda or demand fairness but that Jesus would be heralded to the world, if need be through our faith-filled suffering.

God the words I have just written are scary for me. My life and faith-life has been easy. Are you preparing me for some kind of change? Oh God what I do know is that I need your strength for Your call, whatever it might be and I know I need more and greater amounts of boldness to speak of Jesus to my world. In His name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, August 16: Acts 7- Like father; like son...

My wife and I have been going through boxes and boxes of old photos, maybe 25 years worth. Some are dated and others not. We are culling our pre-digital photos, keeping good shots and tossing out duplicates and bad shots. We are also organizing them into year and month & activity. It has become quite a project. So far our organized photos fill a dozen photo shoe boxes!

One of the joys of this much-longer-than-we-expected project is the journey down memory lane that the photos provide. My wife and I have smiled and laughed and teared-up going through the photos. There are so many photos of my kids, particularly my boys, doing what I am doing (My wife was the family photographer in the early days so we have many less pictures of her during those years).

Like father; like son would be a good caption.

When I read the report of Stephen's death, "like father; like son" came to mind. Stephen acted very much like his Lord Jesus at his death.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep (59-60).

Jesus prayed, "into your hands I commit my spirit" shortly before he died (Luke 23:46). Jesus also prayed, "Father forgive them because they know not what they doing" (Luke 23:34). I smile realizing that both of these quotes are found in Luke's first volume, his gospel.

Stephen, like Jesus; like disciple.

As I was typing those last words it hit me... am I like Jesus? Would I in the face of this tragedy emulate Jesus? Do I emulate Jesus in my everyday living?

I consider myself a disciple of Jesus and disciples do what their master's do and they behave like their master's behave. Disciples are learning to be like their masters. Am I learning to be like Jesus? Really am I?

Are you?

Think about it...

O Jesus in this account Stephen is called 'a man full of the Holy Spirit' (7:55). I pray that I too am known as a man full of the Holy Spirit and that in my life people see reflections of You. In Your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Friday, August 17: Acts 8- Prodding's of God...

What a chapter. The chapter begins with persecution which fires a move of God in Samaria, Caesarea and even sends the first convert to Ethiopia. Confirming the gospel of Jesus are signs and wonders and even 'teleportation' of one saint named Philip, one of the seven appointed in chapter 6. The gospel is advancing in incredible ways.

My thoughts return to the persecution that seems to spark *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison (1-3).

Reading that Saul was approving of the killing of Stephen I was reminded of Stephen's prayer for forgiveness just before he died (7:59). I can't help but wonder if Saul's conversion in chapter 9 isn't in part a result of Stephen's prayer. Oh the wonders of life in Jesus.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* Because of the persecution believers, who prayed for great boldness in chapter 4 are being scattered to Judea and Samaria. Jesus' statement is beginning to be realized. And persecution was the explosion that pushed the believers out of Jerusalem.

God, at times of His understanding, uses hardship to advance His name and purposes in our world. This seems to be the case with Stephen's martyrdom and is certainly the case with the ensuing persecution.

I wonder if the Church had taken Jesus' words to heart and spread out to Judea and Samaria on their own, then the persecution would have been unnecessary. Just wondering...

My wonderings turn personal... does my lack of immediate obedience ever necessitate God to do some prodding in my life, even uncomfortable hardship or pain prodding? Again just wondering...

The Lord will see His word fulfilled. Believers will witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth. This task still needs completion. What am I doing to see that it is completed? Am I doing all God asks me to do to see His name spread around this globe?

I am reminded of the words to a song: Faithfulness, faithfulness is what I long for faithfulness is what I need. O God I pray for faithfulness, integrity, and strength to do Your will and Your bidding. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.

Saturday, August 18: Acts 9- The Encourager...

Saul, who becomes Paul, dominates the opening of the chapter. As his story unfolds two men were essential for Paul to become the great apostle, missionary and voice for Jesus in the early church.

The first is Ananias. At the Lord's command Ananias had to lay aside his fear about Paul – word about Saul mission to kill believers spread – go to him and pray for Paul's healing and filling with the Holy Spirit. Ananias did just that. His brief conversation with the Lord is one example of how a Spirit-empowered believer receives guidance from the Lord.

The second person is Barnabas. After his healing Paul fearlessly preaches Jesus in Damascus earning him death threats. After being sneaked out of the city by believers Paul goes back to Jerusalem where believers are afraid to meet him. Enter Barnabas, who takes Paul under his wing vouches for him and introduces him around to the apostles.

It struck me how God used these two men to bring Paul into the center of the Christian community.

Then it struck me God continues to use followers to bring others into the center of His will. I wondered who God would have me be a 'Barnabas' for someone? I wondered if God called me to pray for someone, especially a scary someone, if I would be as faithful as Ananias?

O God, give me the faith of Ananias and the heart of Barnabas... so that I might be used by You to spread Your name and help bring others into the center of Your will. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Sunday, August 19, 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.