

The Weekly Word
Dec 17-23, 2018

As we enter this 3rd week of Advent I hope your Bible reading is filling your soul. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, December 17: Matthew 18- Angels...

I rarely consider angels. Oh, I believe in angels (and demons as well), but I don't think about their ministry or function in the world very often. Reading verse 10 forced me to consider angels.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

In the context of the chapter 'little ones' infers children. Jesus clearly states that 'little ones' have angels assigned to them and that these angels *always see the face of my Father in heaven*. This verse suggests that these angels have constant and direct access to God the Father.

I suspect that this verse is the Biblical origin for 'guardian angels,' angels assigned to protect each of us. Reading this verse at face value, it appears that 'little ones' have guardian angels assigned to them; whether or not this angel stays connected to a person for the remainder of her/his life on earth is beyond what the text says. It could be that each of us has an angel assigned to watch over us or it could be that at some point in life when we are no longer considered a 'little one' the angel is relieved of its duty. At least from this verse we cannot make a definitive statement.

As I ponder the concept of a guardian angel, for children or for everyone, I wonder what their assignment really is. Plenty of bad things happen to people and children, so this angel's assignment clearly isn't to keep us from all harm. No one lives a problem free, harm free life, not even for 'little ones' years of life.

So, I am left wondering, if I have an angel assigned to me, what its duty might be.

I don't want to disregard a gift the Lord may have assigned to me, but neither do I want to put my trust in anyone other than the Lord Jesus. Jesus alone can save and lead me into righteousness. If God has assigned an angel to me, I will praise God. And since I may never know for certain whether or not an angel is assigned to me, I will keep my focus on Jesus. He alone is the *author and finisher of my faith* (Hebrews 12:2) and the only one sent from heaven through whom we must be saved (see Acts 4:12).

Jesus, I look to You and You alone for salvation and sanctification. Keep me focused on You, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, December 18: Matthew 19- A question most of us ask at some time...

I believe all of us at some time in our lives wonder if there is more to life than the life we are living. Along with this, I suspect many of us wonder about an 'after life' and how a person attains it. Like the man in verse 16 we wonder what we have to DO to get the 'after life' or 'life eternal'. *Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"*

Jesus' answer; 'Keep the commandments', which is impossible for us humans to do perfectly (see 17-19), so we find ourselves in a double bind. Jesus has told us what we must do to inherit eternal life, but it is something that is impossible for us to do.

We are stuck and in trouble...

As we keep reading, Jesus eventually brings out a second truth. Verse 26: *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

We cannot do what it takes to inherit eternal life... it is impossible for man! But that is not the last word. The last word is that *with God all things are possible*.

God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

God can save us... and in Christ, God does save us.

Belief in Jesus is the only way of salvation... the New Testament is clear on this point over and over again. Jesus became man so that he could teach us the ways of God and then be the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and redeems us.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

Lord Jesus, thank You for doing for me what I could never have accomplished for myself. Thank You, Jesus, for saving me and being the reason I have been adopted in God, the Father's, family. I am forever thankful, Lord, for Your gift of salvation. May I live today and each day in a way that points people to You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, December 19: Matthew 20- Everything we need to remain faithful ...

As with most Gospel chapters there is more in the chapter than can be pondered in one sitting. Jesus' prediction caught my eye.

Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (17-19).

The NIV caption introducing this section is "Jesus predicts His death a third time." Actually it is much more than a prediction of His death. Jesus gives His disciples a prediction of all that would happen shortly. Jesus' prediction to His 12 apostles is full and detailed. They alone are briefed on what is to come. Jesus' Word is so complete He includes His mocking and flogging. And it even includes His resurrection!

In the grief and shock of Jesus' death, I am not surprised that the disciples forgot and were grieved by all that happened to Jesus. But having been given this Word imparts perspective to them once they came to their senses following Jesus' resurrection.

This is so much more than a mere prediction of His death... it includes the whole of the passion and resurrection.

Jesus gives them all the information they need to maintain faith during the ordeal to come. Isn't that like Jesus to give us everything we need to remain faithful! Then after His resurrection He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we are never alone and have the divine teacher/counselor with us at all times.

Thank You, Jesus, and Father for giving us everything we need to remain faithful. God, I am reminded of Your word in Ephesians 1:3 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Every Spiritual blessing!

Thank You, Lord God, for thinking of and providing everything we need to maintain and grow in faith. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, December 20: Matthew 21- Surprise reactions to 'wonderful things'...

I was attracted to verses 14-15, *The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.* I noticed that one cannot be sure how people will react even to good events.

Jesus is doing miracles and the *chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things*. I noticed that the religious leaders saw the wonderful deeds of Jesus. The descriptor 'wonderful' caught my eye. Then came the surprise... *they were indignant.*

How is it that you can become indignant when someone is doing wonderful things???

We humans are funny creatures. When things don't fit our categories we can become confused, even defiant, protecting our ways and traditions.

I remember reading about people who fed the meters of cars that run out of time in an Ohio city. The city became indignant and barred that behavior? Crazy right?! Likely the city was losing out on revenues from fines so the wonderful things were not appreciated.

I read another story about a woman who had been incapacitated for years because of significant back problems. Her church had cared for her and visited her for years and years. Then one day her son took her to a traveling preacher and she was completely healed. Crippled and immobile one moment, back brace off, walking and praising God the next. It was like the cripple healed in Acts 4. Sadly, her church could not accept her healing and she ended up having to leave the church!! Crazy right?! Somehow her healing threatened their categories and they couldn't handle her healing.

I realized just because I do wonderful things -ministries of compassion, healing, etc. -people may not accept it. In fact they might even become indignant. Such was the lot of Jesus and I shouldn't be surprised if I receive the same reception from some people.

We do our good deeds, not for human accolades, but because they please our Lord. How people react to our good deeds or 'wonderful things' is up to them. Hmmm...

Lord, help me to keep on serving You, no matter the reaction people have to my deeds and words. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, December 21: Matthew 22- All summed up in LOVE...

According to Jesus all the Old Testament is summed up in the law of love; love God and love neighbor. Of those two commandments Jesus said, *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments* (40).

Sometimes people will say, 'what would Jesus do?' when trying to decide how to act in a given situation. As I listen to this, maybe we should learn to ask ourselves Jesus' statement 'what would love do?'

Now before I run with this I have to ponder the meaning of love. The word for love used in both commandments is 'agape'. Agape is not love as in gushy feeling, or romantic love or even brotherly love. Agape is a love born out of a deep commitment to God -heart, mind, soul and strength, and one that sees value in caring for others (one's neighbors).

So as I am living life I need to learn to ask, 'what would devotion to God do in this situation and how might it be born out as I relate to the person in front of me?'

The first and greatest is love for God. While I don't want to pit one commandment against the other, it seems plausible to me that I need to look through the commandment to love God as I seek to engage the second half, 'loving neighbor'.

Lord, can I train myself to think this way? Help me, Lord, to learn and live the commands to love. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, December 22: Matthew 23- Whitewashed tombs...

The Pharisees do not fare very well in this chapter. Jesus is scathing against the Pharisees. While it is easy to dismiss what Jesus says since I, of course, am not a Pharisee! This is a dangerous attitude and one that leaves me susceptible to acting like a Pharisee. So as I read, I tried to take seriously the attitudes Jesus was addressing and not simply dismiss the sayings because Jesus' target was the Pharisees.

As I read, hopefully with an open heart, verses 27-28 reeled me in. *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.*

In my profession it is all too easy to become a "professional Christian." I know the right answers. I can teach the right theology, but I can become lazy in my Christ-like living. I think this is why these verses caught my eye. They speak directly to this concern. I can look and sound the 'professional believer' having the appearance of being pristine and white, but inside be corrupt and as Jesus put it be *full of hypocrisy and wickedness*..

I hope and pray this is not the case in my life. Wisdom reminds me that I need to look inside and examine my motivations regularly. Introspection and confession are important activities to protect me from becoming a whitewashed tomb. Another protection is meeting with others who know me and can ask hard questions.

My denomination asks each pastor to be in a pastoral covenant group where we can ask one another hard questions. I was in one but distance didn't work for me. I have been intending to organize one with pastors closer to where I live, but I have been slow to act.

God's voice is convicting me here. And I covenant to send out an invite email this week. Also I have begun meeting with a local pastor and hopefully that will grow into another accountability partnership. I don't want to become like the Pharisees, *a whitewashed tomb!*

Lord, lead me into relationships that will help keep me faithful to You, into relationships that will cause me to be honest with myself before You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Sunday, December 23, 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.