

The Weekly Word
May 13-19, 2019

Days are longer and warmer and Spring is in full bloom. I love this time of the year and I love reading God's truth. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, May 13: Malachi 2- Instruct well...

Malachi is one accusation after another. Israel is being taken to the woodshed.

God accusation against Israel's teachers is the one that pierced me because it connects so closely with my profession and calling...

"For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the LORD Almighty. "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law" (7-9).

Preserve knowledge... be a messenger of the Lord... instruct the people... this is what pastor/teachers are called to do. This is what I am called to do. And to turn away from this is to deserve the wrath of the Lord.

Oh, God, may I never do that. Lord, may my mouth be closed rather than break my sacred calling to be a pastor/teacher faithful to You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, May 14: Malachi 3- How God doesn't want us to live...

I was looking forward to this chapter because I thought I would meditate on the teaching of the tithe. Having recently completed Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University, I was primed to put some of that teaching into my meditations. But the Lord, I guess, had other ideas.

As I was reading, verse 5 seemed to have a neon sign pointing to it. So that verse is where I felt I should sit and listen and think.

"So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

God's list of indictments surprised me. *Sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers... those who defraud laborers of their wages* describe people who broke specific commandments. Have no other gods, don't covet neighbor's wife, do not lie, and do not steal. But then comes various compassion and mercy breaches: *oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me...*

Oppressing widows and the fatherless, denying justice to foreigners... my thoughts frightened me. God is judging Israel for doing these things, and I thought my country is doing those things as well! Will we be judged? I know we are not a theocracy with God as our head. Still an awful lot of people toss around that we are a country built on Judeo-Christian values. And care for widows, the fatherless and justice for foreigners is throughout the Bible, thus

clearly part of our values system and we as a nation aren't very good at caring for these specific groups, particularly providing justice for foreigners.

I don't want my thoughts to venture into politics, but my heart weeps because of the rhetoric and actions of our government officials toward foreigners. My fear is that our actions are making the heart of God cry. We are certainly not living up to God's directive in verse 5. In fact we are not even living up to the words inscribed on Lady Liberty as she stands in NY Harbor:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

My heart is saddened today as I sit with God's Word open on my lap. Saddened at the words and actions of many of my elected and appointed leaders. And saddened at myself because I haven't said or done anything about it...

Oh, God, I pray for forgiveness and correction... the latter, Lord, is a scary thing for which to be praying. In Jesus' name I dare to pray. Amen.

Wednesday, May 15: Malachi 4- Hark the herald angels sing...

As soon as I read verse 2, *But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves,* I thought I bet the King James Version reads 'healing in his wings.' So I looked it up. Sure enough, verse 2 KJV goes like this: *But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

Why did that click? It clicked because of one of my favorite Christmas Hymns, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, by Charles Wesley. That man could pen a hymn to God! Check out stanza 3:

Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace!
Hail the sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that we no more may die,
Born to raise each child of earth,
Born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn king!"

The KJV was the primary Bible in Wesley's day and a man of deep faith steeped in the Bible as he was, the connection clicked.

Truth is I have often wondered from where Wesley's phrase came. I never connected it with Malachi 4 before.

I found myself humming Wesley's great hymn. Here are the words of stanza's 1 and 2.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn king;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all you nations, rise;
Join the triumph of the skies;

With angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn king!"

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail, incarnate deity!
Pleased as man with us to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn king!"

What a wonder and what a gift Jesus is. We are so fortunate living in the reality of the New Testament knowing the wonder of Jesus the Savior. Wesley may be right, Malachi was prophesying of His day to come. And we have seen it. Thanks be to God.

Oh, God, we are so blessed to live in the time we do and under the New Covenant in Jesus. Thank You for revealing Yourself to me and us. Help me to always sing of Jesus and share His name with others! Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled... Halleluiah. Amen.

Thursday, May 16: Galatians 1 - Why did Jesus come...

Why did Jesus come into our world? Paul gives us an answer in his blessing in the letter's opening: *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Jesus came to rescue us from this evil age. I don't normally think of the time in which I live as an 'evil age.' Oh, there are evil people and people do evil things (despots, mass shootings, corrupt politicians and business folk, etc.), but I really don't think of our age as an 'evil age.'

I sat and pondered this....

Slowly it dawned on me, Paul is writing from God's perspective. God, who sees the heart and knows the intentions of people, sees all the results of the fall in every human life. God sees hypocrisy in lives that look pretty good to me. God hears curses mumbled under our breaths. God feels the pain of people injured by others or self. I think a large part of me doesn't want to see the evil in this age because that would require me to see the evil in me.

Again, if I think about this from God's perspective the phrase comes into clearer view. From God's point any break in the law of love (love God; love others) no matter how seemingly slight is a break of the entire law and is considered unrighteous or evil. By that standard my life and our world is certainly an evil age since no one –except Jesus himself –has ever lived a perfect sinless life.

The good news is that Jesus came to rescue us from this evil age and, as Paul notes in Colossians, brings us in to God's realm of living. (*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, Colossians 1:13*)

And that is why Jesus came... and I am forever and for always grateful that He rescued me.

Thank You, Lord God, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, for rescuing me and bringing me into Your kingdom. Through Jesus, my Savior, I pray. Amen.

Friday, May 17: Galatians 2- Mixed motives...

It was not until the end of the chapter that I found my words to camp upon for today.

"... I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (19-21)

These words are so rich. They are both a theological statement of truth and something I have to live into.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. Paul is not only making a statement for himself, he is expressing a truth of the gospel. When I put my faith in Jesus I was crucified with Him. This is symbolized in baptism as I pass under the water. I died through faith so that Jesus Christ could live in and through me. Still, honestly, I have much dying to self still to do. Too often my living is more about self than it is about Jesus.

I am sitting here today confronted with the reality of the already but not yet. I have already been saved, but I am not yet fully sanctified. My sins have been washed away, but I continue to sin. The power of Jesus is alive and well within me, still I fall short because I don't reach for Christ's power, I seek to live in my own.

As a result my life is a checker board of good and bad, victory and defeat. Yesterday a friend reminded me of a quote I shared with him years ago. It is from Elizabeth Elliot: "The best we can hope for is mixed motives". And mine are certainly mixed!

I desperately need a savior.

Thank You, Jesus, for coming and saving a wretch like me... I surely need it. Amen.

Saturday, May 18: Galatians 3- Christ cursed to redeem the world...

So much to think about. So much truth to absorb. So many places to pause and ponder... Where I land is verse 13.* *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."*

How staggering is this word. Jesus, God in human flesh, became a curse for us!

What Jesus did in order to save us boggles my mind. Becoming human and setting aside parts of His divinity (Philippians 2) is staggering in and of itself, but then to go the extra mile (or extra million miles) and taking on our justly deserved curse, *becoming a curse for us...* I have no words to express my gratitude and my profound amazement.

I sit here humbled yet again by Jesus' love and sacrifice.

Tomorrow as we enter worship we have an opportunity as a community to thank and praise Jesus, the Father and the Spirit, for the gift of salvation... the gift of supreme love.

I have no words, Oh God, just joy in my heart, praise on my lips and a desire to live for and serve You who have given everything for me. Amen and amen.

* I work ahead on my devotionals and I am writing this on Good Friday... no surprise the verse about Jesus' death was the one upon which my heart settled.

Sunday, May 19, 2019, 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 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.