

The Weekly Word

June 3-9, 2019

Happy June, summer is here. And remember, too, God is always here and His Word is always true. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, June 3: Philippians 4 -Contentment...

The art of contentment... Paul's words strike a nerve. Ah, to live like Paul, content in any and every circumstance. *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want I can do all this through him who gives me strength* (12-13).

I find that I am often thinking about how things could be better/nicer. I think, oh, the house could be... fill in the blank. In our yard it would be nice to have this or that. And I could add to this many other aspects of my life where I think about better or nicer. I often don't do anything about these better/nicer dreams, typically weighing the options and deciding not to do these things. But what I am wondering this morning is if these are signs of discontentment???

I look back at Paul's words. He is talking about elemental needs like food; I notice the issues I mentioned were 'above and beyond' concerns like quality of housing or beauty of my yard, first world issues.

I am living in an entirely different manner than Paul. My life and my world is very different than Paul's. I am realizing that I need to probe below these comforts of life to consider deeper things...

Do I need to amp up my commitment to Gospel advancement? This, after all, is Paul's overriding concern, that no matter his circumstances he is pressing the Gospel forward.

Do I need to take my eyes off my life situation and focus more on my kingdom role and less on my quality of life?

I am realizing that my material world has a considerably stronger hold on me than I like to admit. Now what should I do about this?

This is a much more difficult question, because it requires deep thought and a willingness to change and grow. Balancing life and faith is never a simple matter...

Lord, sit with me today. Speak in the quiet moments of the day. Direct me. Open my eyes to Your ways. As I move through today, use encounters, use observations, use musings and thoughts to make plain to me areas that need growth in my life and aspects of change I could/should implement.

Lord, help me to anchor myself to the advancement of the Gospel. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, June 4: Philemon – The power of faith in Jesus...

While Philemon is a personal letter written to Philemon, it is also a letter sent to the church that meets in Philemon's home. We learn this from the opening. *Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home* (1-2).

I am not sure how hand delivered letters worked. Did the messenger deliver it to all the parties named or only the primary person named? Since this was sent to a church, was it read to

the gathered body? I don't know, but it seems reasonable that the various named people knew the content of the letter.

In this particular case Onesimus, the run-a-way slave, was part of the party delivering the letter. I thought about how awkward it must have been when he showed up at the door in the group carrying the letter.

In Philemon's world run-a-way slaves, like Onesimus, could receive the death penalty. Certainly the entire household knew what Onesimus had done. I imagine the entire church that met in Philemon's house also knew what Onesimus had done. What thoughts shot through the minds of those present when he shows up at the door with the letter. What did people think?

I wondered what I might have thought.

Before anyone could speak and explain things, before I read the letter I would have been shocked. Depending upon what Onesimus actually did (Did he steal things? Did he break things? Did he say injurious things before he left?) I might have been angry seeing him. Whatever my outward reactions, inwardly I probably would have been thinking that my rights were violated and he should pay for his wrong doings.

I suspect most people in the church would have similar reactions, particularly because all they would know about the situation was what Philemon and other household members told them. So they would see Onesimus through Philemon's eyes.

And yet the letter calls for a different response that I suspect most people had. The letter calls for a response of forgiveness and receiving Onesimus back not as a slave but as a brother. The fact that this letter is part of the New Testament suggests that Philemon and the others did just that. They forgave and they received him into the church as a brother.

Not only does the Lord forgive someone when they come to faith. In this case God asked the church to forgive the offender as well.

Only God, the Holy Spirit, could affect this response in Philemon and the others.

I am marveling at the power of God and realizing that this same power is available in my life... to live out the Gospel, whether that means forgiving someone who has hurt me or loving someone very different than me or taking a risk for Gospel sake.

Lord God, too often I underestimate the power of Your presence in my life. Too often I think in merely human terms, what can be done rather than believing Your power to affect change if You want to bring it about. Help me, Lord God, to live faithfully and to trust You when You direct me to do something for kingdom sake. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, June 5: Jeremiah 1 -God's call and election ...

God's call and election of Jeremiah bursts on the page in verse 4: *The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations"* (4-5). As soon as I began to think on this verse and the call and election of God, two New Testament verses came to mind

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. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will (Ephesians 1:3-5).

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

There are others...

To consider that God in His infinite wisdom chose me, chose us, this is staggeringly humbling.

Oh, God, I don't want to let You down. I long to serve you with energy and intelligence, wisdom and in Your power. God, I pray that I live pleasingly to You. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, June 6: Jeremiah 2 – Inviting people to return...

How is it that we stray from the Lord?

This is a sad chapter. A people once strong for the Lord no longer walk with God. Faithfulness has become faithlessness.

The good news is that God is using Jeremiah to call the people back home to faith and belief in Him.

The sad news is that they are no longer worshipping God in the first place and they seem to not be responding to God's invitation to come home.

I see so many parallels with life today. Many people seem to be drifting from the faith of their youth. As sad and disappointing as that is, worse is that they don't seem to be responding to God's invitation to come back home.

As I consider this chapter, what I am hearing is that I have to have the persistence of the Lord and to keep inviting people back to faith in Jesus. Like Jeremiah I need to continue to call to them and invite them home, whether they respond positively or not....

Lord, I pray for this generation... I am sitting in an airport with hundreds of people walking by. I know nothing about their faith; if they have faith in Jesus, ever had faith in Jesus, are interested in faith in Jesus or faith of any kind for that matter. Lord, may I be open to be used of You to help anyone interested navigate their way back to You or to You for the first time. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, June 7: Jeremiah 3 – I am here, come home...

Six times, seven if you include 4:1 which most commentators believe is a continuation of the section that concludes chapter 3, we read God's invitation to return. God is longing for His people to return to Him from chasing after false gods.

Over and over again God calls out, 'Return to Me'... Even though Israel and Judah are faithless God calls them home over and over again.

Reading this reminds me how God continually calls me home. When I sin, God continually invites me to return to Him. God never abandons His own.

I am feeling overwhelmed by life right now. I feel mostly empty. When I sit I am not feeling a deep or great rush of connection with my God. I know He is there, but I am not 'feeling' it. I sense my busyness is robbing me of this connection, which by the way feels true with my closest loved ones as well.

Still I sit. I accept God's invitation to return and I do return. I consciously sit with the Lord, trying to slow my distracted mind and focus on the Lord. It is hard for me right now to still my mind.

Thankfully I hear the repeated refrain of the Lord, "Return, come back, I am here. I have never forsaken you..."

I sit with my Lord, as best I can, and soak in His presence...

Lord, I am so blessed that You are always there. You are never busy. You are never distracted. You are never in a hurry. You are always waiting, inviting. I praise You, Lord, You are always there for me. I don't deserve Your love,

yet You lavish it anyway. I am so blessed to be Your son. Through the name of my wonderful Savior, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Saturday, June 8: Jeremiah 4 - Grief...

God calls His people to return, but when they do not God keeps His word and punishment follows. How sad... Oh, how sad.

Some day, on the day of God's own choosing, a similar scenario will play out. Only this time it will be on a worldwide scale. God is issuing a call to return to Him. Those who turn to God through faith in Jesus will be saved. Those who do not return will be lost to destruction. The deserved punishment for sin will be executed.

The book of Revelation tells this story. Christ will return and execute the judgments of God. Those washed by faith in Jesus will join Jesus in a new heaven and new earth. Those who have not turned to Jesus will be cast into the eternal fires reserved for the devil and all who reject Jesus as Lord.

This truth causes me to grieve... so many lost... so many.

Lord, may the words of my mouth and the actions of my life and the mediations of my heart be used to help some return to You. I ask for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit because I know that in my strength my words, actions and mediations will amount to nothing. Only empowered and directed by You will they bring any spiritual good. So, I pray and ask, empower me to do the works You have prepared already for me to do (see Ephesians 2:10). In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Sunday, June 9, 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.