

The Weekly Word

June 24-30, 2019

This week marks the mid point of 2019. Where does time go? One thing I know is that God's Word is eternal. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, June 24: Jeremiah 17 – The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure....

One of the memorable verses of Jeremiah appears in this chapter. Verse 9: *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

In this single sentence we see the effects of the fall on humanity. Our heart has been damaged. It is deceitful; *deceitful above all things and beyond cure*, writes Jeremiah under the inspiration of the Lord.

We sin because we are sinners. We sin because our *heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure*.

Our situation is such that we cannot dig or work our way out of our problem, our heart is *beyond cure*.

Our only hope is a new heart. We need a heart transplant if we are going to be invited back into the fold of the Lord. And that is precisely what Jesus provided when He saved us.

Without the atoning work of Jesus we are lost, beyond cure. Ephesians 2 says we are dead! Only because God resuscitates us by grace are we spiritually alive.

I am realizing again for the umpteenth time how grateful I am to God for the salvation He provided me.

Only by God's grace...

Thank You, Lord God –Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit –for saving me, for giving me a new heart, for bringing me back from spiritual death to life in You. Amen and amen.

Tuesday, June 25: Jeremiah 18 – The Lord builds up and the Lord tears down...

God makes a statement about His absolute authority. It sent my thoughts swirling. *If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it (7-10).*

While this is a word to Israel, God speaks in absolute terms, citing a nation or kingdom twice in these sentences. The clear implication is that God can do this for ANY nation or kingdom He chooses... so, Israel, you better listen and repent. If you don't, destruction is your lot.

As the book continues and history records God follows through.

My thoughts raced through history up to the present. How many nations, kingdoms, empires have come and gone on the pages of history. Sitting atop the world one moment and in some cases completely gone not too many years hence.

Since I believe God is sovereign, I see God's hand in all this.

Where my thoughts traveled next is to thoughts about our present world and my country in particular. So much of the political in-fighting and deep divisions baffle me. We seem to have lost the sense of ‘governing for the nation’ doing what’s best for the country, which is changing. This is not the first season of great divide in our nation. At one time it actually led to civil war. Maybe because I am in the midst of this latest divide, I cannot see a way out. So I find myself wondering more and more often lately, is God’s hand behind the growing divide using it as the force that will dismantle our country, yet another in the long line of nations and kingdoms God has raised up and torn down?

These thoughts sadden me. Our nation, or better the people of our nation, once provided the fuel for gospel advance worldwide. Not everything in the great missionary movement was done well, but it advanced the name of Jesus around the globe and particularly into the developing world, where the church continues to thrive. Now the strongest movements for advancing the gospel are from developing nations. Maybe in the economy of God my country is being brought down. I don’t know. I wonder and I pray and I live as faithfully as I can trusting God, who alone is sovereign.

Lord, keep me faithful in these strange and turbulent days. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, June 26: Jeremiah 19 - Topheth...

The indictment against Israel grows. God’s judgment is announced as more of Israel’s crimes are announced. *‘Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter (3-6).*

Four times Jeremiah references Topheth (sometimes Tophet). For those who don’t know that word, a simple google search reveals that Topheth was a despicable practice where worshipers, influenced by the ancient Canaanite religion, engaged in the human sacrifice of children to the gods Moloch and Baal by burning children alive.

I have a copy of a Biblical Archaeology Review magazine that featured Topheth. Hundreds of urns filled with the charred remains of children were found. Apparently people sacrifice children to the gods Moloch and Baal in the hopes of receiving some blessings or another.

My heart sinks... how heinous we humans can be to those deemed less... children, handicapped peoples, foreigners, certain ethnicities. Images of Nazi gas chambers come to mind as does killing fields in Uganda, and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. I knew there were many more. I googled ‘ethnic genocide’ and found a list in Wikipedia. I counted at least 90 examples and that doesn’t include any in this present century. We humans can be barbaric for personal gain or pleasure.

And the list didn’t include barbarism for pleasure like fights to the death in the Roman Coliseum or millions of pre-born children aborted worldwide.

I sat realizing how ‘not-good’ we humans are. While Topheth and the above modern examples of atrocities may include some of the most heinous actions of people against people sin is rampant in all of us.

The only way I could dispel all this mayhem from my thoughts was to turn my attention to the Lord, to God’s wonder, goodness and His love for us (me) expressed in the gift of Jesus. Jesus went to the cross to pay for all this sin... all my sin.

My heart sinks into thanks...

Thank You, Lord God, Father Spirit, Jesus. Thank You. Amen.

Thursday, June 27: Jeremiah 20 – Talking with God in the midst of a life-storm...

Amazing... I thought of printing verses 7-18, what the NIV titles ‘Jeremiah’s Complaint’. It is a tremendous example of faith under fire and living with adversity. (I have been preaching on this lately so I have been thinking about how to live when in the midst of the storm and that is exactly what Jeremiah is doing...)

Jeremiah is frustrated by his call from God because executing God’s call faithfully has brought him pain and ridicule. *You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long (7-8).*

The Lord called Jeremiah to speak words of judgment and destruction on Jerusalem. We read his words... and the Israel’s leadership continually hurls insults and punishes him (read verses 1-6). I get that Jeremiah is frustrated.

If you have ever been asked by God to do something uncomfortable and confronting and you have been rejected by the people to whom you were sent, you may have a sense of Jeremiah’s complaint.

Despite the abuse heaped on Jeremiah he will not stray for faithful living and speaking for the Lord. Jeremiah knows that the Lord will be his vindication. *But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten. LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have committed my cause (11-12).*

I love the fact that his call is painful and difficult, that he is frustrated and hurt by what God has called him to do. (verse 7: *You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed*). Still Jeremiah remains committed to the Lord (*for to you I have committed my cause*).

When we are in the midst of the storm, like Jeremiah, we need to stay the course with the Lord.

Even as Jeremiah stays the course with the Lord, we see him both praising the Lord and venting. I am helped listening to this, because I have been there... both grateful for the Lord and frustrated and angry about the present circumstances...*Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked. Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed! (13-14).*

I am so encouraged seeing all this going on in a man who is faithfully living for the Lord during a very difficult time in his life.

God is with us in the storms! And God invites us to be real with Him about all we are going through... as we are going through it!

Oh, Lord, this word was such a breath of fresh air for me. Thank You, Lord, and thank you, Jeremiah, for these honest and inspired words. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, June 28: Jeremiah 21 – Always an offer of Grace...

The chapter opens with God's declared intentions to punish Jerusalem. *But Jeremiah answered them, "Tell Zedekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am about to turn against you the weapons of war that are in your hands, which you are using to fight the king of Babylon and the Babylonians who are outside the wall besieging you. And I will gather them inside this city (3-4).*

God's intentions are clear and specific.

The chapter closes with yet another word from the Lord: *"Moreover, say to the royal house of Judah, 'Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the LORD says to you, house of David: " 'Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done— burn with no one to quench it (11-12 bold mine).*

My read, focusing particularly on the bolded words: God continues to extend a hand of mercy if Jerusalem will change her ways.

God's mercy never fails to amaze me. With Judgement looming, God offers a way out, 'begin to live as I created you to live. Acknowledge Me and change your ways...'

God's love for His people truly is from everlasting to everlasting. He will no longer tolerate their rebelliousness and sin, but His love for them remains untainted.

What an incredible balancing act it is to be able to judge sin and wrong behavior while still continuing to love unconditionally. This is the way of God and God displays it here in Jeremiah 21.

As I sat... I realized that this is how God looks at and sees me every day. God's unconditional love washes over my life all the time. Still the Lord calls me to account for the sin actions in which I engage. Yes, Jesus has paid my sin penalty, but my sins still grieve God and He calls me to confession and right living. Thinking over God's response to Jerusalem, I am reminded about how God's grace is always present, always there, calling me back to God's ways for living.

Lord God, I bless and love You. I can flourish because Your grace and mercy are never far, inviting my depraved-self back home to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, June 29: Jeremiah 22 - Leadership in God's economy is a privilege that carries weighty responsibilities...

The chapter is God's judgment against the kings of Judah for rejecting God's ways. It begins with God extending a hand that if the king would repent and begin governing as He, the Lord, desires then God would be his protector but if not God will bring him to ruin (see verses 1-5).

Jeremiah has presented this offer before. Sadly the kings never accept God's invitation to return.

Leadership in God's economy is a privilege that carries weighty responsibilities. I recall that kings were to make their own copy of the law (Deuteronomy 17:18). It seems to me that this was one way they were to immerse themselves in God's Word and Law. It is important to have quality advisors, but a leader must be grounded and centered her/himself.

Israel's kings have strayed from this ideal. I wonder if any kings made their personal copy of the law. Kingship became a birthright rather than an honor and privilege. The reasons for governing have degenerated into self-aggrandizement and governing for the benefit of self rather than care of the people. And in Israel's theocracy, the king was God's governing representative; the majority of Israel's kings completely missed this requirement.

I am not a king... still I see implications for me as a child of God and a pastor of a church.

As a pastor I, too, should lead as God's representative and teacher in the body of believers. This means first and foremost being grounded in God and His Word as first responsibility. It means guiding the church to live faithfully unto the Lord and like the kings of Israel, much of this is witnessed by right actions, not merely 'correct theological beliefs.'

As a child of God I hear God's reminder to stay in the Word... and to live the Word. As James says, 'be doers of the word and not hearers only'. *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says* (James 1: 22).

So, Lord, on the eve of worship, bring my heart and life into alignment with You and Your Word. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, June 30, 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.