

The Weekly Word
October 12-18, 2020

As fall settles in may you settle into the delight of regularly reading God's Word. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, October 12: Hebrews 9- Once for all...

*He [Christ] did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place **once for all** by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.... For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant, (12,15).*

*For Christ ... entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared **once for all** at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, **so Christ was sacrificed once** to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (24-28).*

The author of Hebrews is going to great lengths to explain to a Jewish audience that Jesus is the once for all sacrifice for sins. Likely written shortly before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the writer argues that unlike the Jewish sacrifices, which need to be repeated year after year, Jesus' death –His sacrifice –only needed to happen once because in its perfection it was efficacious for all time. As the writer puts it ***Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many...***

The phrase 'of many' reminds me that a person must put her or his faith in Jesus for His sacrifice to be efficacious in taking away their sins. Faith in Jesus is the key to unlock God's gift of salvation.

Sitting with these words before me I am reminded that I bring nothing to salvation and that I need to add nothing to Jesus' once for all gift. Jesus did all that was and is necessary perfectly on the cross. And since His sacrifice was once for all, there will never be the need for an even more perfect, new and different covenant from the covenant of Jesus.

Jesus' gift truly was once for all... all time and all people who believe. Once for all...

If you are reading this blog post, this is a good time to pause and ask yourself the eternal question, "Have I put my faith in Jesus and His once for all sacrifice?"

I have and in that I rejoice today and every day.

Lord, I am so blessed to be among the many... I am so blessed that Your Holy Spirit drew me to Jesus and enabled me to believe in Jesus. Thank You, Lord God, for saving me. In the name of my Lord Jesus I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, October 13: Hebrews 10– Let us...

I was attracted to the three 'let us' in verse 22-25.

The paragraph begins with a “therefore” (19) showing that these words are connected to Jesus’ ‘once for all’ sacrifice. As such they provide practical advice for living out our faith in Jesus.

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water (22).

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (23).

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (24-25).

Let us... draw near to God. A regular daily practice of staying near and moving toward God should be the orientation of our lives. The world pulls me away from God so I find that I need to make a determined effort to regularly (daily, often multiple times a day) draw close to the Lord.

Let us ... hold unswervingly to the truth and hope we have. Again, the world in which we all live will try to tell us that faith in Jesus is unnecessary, that faith is a weakness and built on a lie. I need to reject this regularly. This means I need to first recognize the falsehoods of the ‘preaching of the world’ and cling to God and His word as ultimate truth.

Let us ... spur each other on. Following Jesus isn’t an individual quest. Once we are born again, we are brought into God’s family. We walk together in faith and service of the Lord. Spurring others on then should be part and parcel of our life in Jesus. And a tremendous aspect of this advice is that when I am strong, I can do the spurring for others and when I am weak others will spur me on. This mutuality of help and encouragement is one of the great blessings of being part of God’s family, the church. I have learned over the decades that I have to give myself to the mutuality of God’s family. It won’t simply happen and it certainly can’t happen if I hold others in the church at arms length.

So these ‘let us’ remind me there are some personal things I need to do to stay connected to the Lord and some things I need to do with and for my church family to stay connected to the Lord...

Lord, I pray for strength to live out these three admonitions... that my faith will stay strong so that through my faithful living others will see Jesus and Your glory will be spread across the world. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Wednesday, October 14: Hebrews 11-Faith ...

People who have read the Bible likely know that Hebrews 11 is the ‘faith chapter’ with the writer developing a definition and illustrating faith throughout the chapter.

Reading the Bible, a chapter at a time as I do, the focus on faith seems to drop out of the sky as I opened to chapter 11. Understanding that chapter and verses were added much later to aid students in the study of the Bible, I turned back to chapter 10 and read the concluding thoughts before I began chapter 11. Chapter 10 ends like this: *But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved (10:39).*

It makes sense then that the author goes on to describe and define faith...

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (1-3).

Confidence and assurance... these two words jump out at me.

It can be difficult to explain faith to another person who doesn't share your faith. Having faith in God –Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit –can sound irrational. Take the idea of Jesus... God becoming human, fully human, who ultimately dies an agonizing death as a criminal, and this is God's plan to save people? If I take this simply on the merits of logical argument it is crazy, even irrational. And yet, I believe it with all my heart and mind and strength. I have full confidence and assurance that it is true.

Now as I push past those two opening words and read on, I see that faith in each case cited leads to action...

- Abel sacrifice
- Enoch skipped death
- Noah warned and built
- Abraham obeyed and went
- And so on

Faith leads to, empowers, and anticipates action.

The whisper of God asks me to examine my life checking for actions that grow from my faith. So, I sit with the Lord examining the way I live for the actions that validate my faith.

I invite you to join me in your own examinations...

Lord, may my life, my actions and my living point to my faith in You and may it, by Your grace, cause people to see and believe in You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, October 15: Hebrews 12– Where faith leads...

For me, this chapter is power packed with timely wisdom and teaching. The decision where to pause and meditate came easily when I realized that the chapter opens 'therefore' indicating it grows from and brings toward conclusion the chapter on faith I read yesterday.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (1-3).

What is the message or outgrowth of faith? I learned yesterday that faith leads to living action as we live for Jesus. Then today the author adds that the terminal destination of faith is perseverance in running the race of a Christ follower. *And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.* The Christ follower race will be difficult, potentially very difficult, and faith gives us fortitude, *so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

As the chapter and the author's line of reasoning continues, he reminds us that the hardships we face as we run the race may be part of God's purifying discipline. I don't like this thought. For some reason, the idea of enemy attack rather than God's discipline sits better in my mind. I think this is because I likely carry no responsibility if it is attack. But if it is discipline then God is trying to get my attention so that I change my way of living... thus I do carry responsibility to change.

As I scan the scriptures in my mind, I realize how accurate the writer is. How often God used an enemy as discipline. Babylon comes to mind immediately. And the repeated cycle in Judges, too, shows how God used an enemy to drive Israel to her knees to cry out to the Lord whom they

had forsaken. As the writer puts it, *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? (7).*

So Lord, teach me to be mindful of Your discipline. And may Your correction produce in me a perseverance and strength that will stand the test of this world until by Your grace, You bring me home to live forever in Your eternal kingdom which cannot be shaken. Through Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, I pray. Amen.

Friday, October 16: Hebrews 13– Love, hospitality, remember...

I love the basic and practical exhortations that the author uses to launch his final words. Sometimes we can fool ourselves into thinking we are beyond the basics. I am not and these practical exhortations are good for my soul and my living...

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (1-5).

Love... I am never so mature that I don't need encouragement to keep on loving people. Regularly I battle with acting as if the world revolves around me. The call to love reminds me others not only exist in my orbit, but caring for them is preeminent!

Hospitality... in some respects hospitality is a sub-action of love. For ancients in the Middle East hospitality was an important life characteristic. I love the caveat that by showing hospitality to strangers *some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it*. What a crazy thought. I wonder if I have ever done that? According to this word, I guess I shouldn't think I will ever know.

Remember those in prison and mistreated... this doesn't seem to fit in the list. The jump from love and hospitality to remembering prisoners and mistreated is a pretty big leap. But it suggests to me that a significant number of people known to the readers were among the prisoners and mistreated. How different their world is from mine. Likely this mention hints at the severity of the hardship they are enduring. In my context it might read 'remember and take care of those who cannot care for themselves'.

The pendulum now swings to marriage and sexuality purity. I guess sexual promiscuity has been an issue in every age! There really is *nothing new under the sun* (Ecclesiastes 1:9, KJV). Controlling sexual passions is as basic as it gets.

Next, we are warned about the danger of the love of money! Again, this is so basic, and still so applicable to my life and life today.

Sometimes we complicate how we are to live as Christ followers. When that happens returning to the basics is always a good idea...

Love, show hospitality, remember those who can't help themselves, remain sexually pure and watch out for the love of money...

Lord, forgive me when I complicate Your way of living. Keep reminding me of the basics and send Your Spirit that with His strength and leading I can become more proficient in Your basics. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, October 17: Deuteronomy 1– Telling God’s story...

Moses knows he is near the end of life. Israel stands poised on the east side of the Jordan ready to begin taking possession of the Land the Lord has sworn to give them. For the past 40 years Moses led Israel as they wandered the wilderness as punishment for disobedience. The generation who cried out in pain under Pharaoh, celebrated the initial Passover, escaped Egypt, passed through the Red Sea and then disobeyed when God first directed them to take the Land has died off. Now the next generation is poised to inherit what their parents could have had.

Before Moses passes the mantle of leadership to Joshua and dies, he expounds to this younger generation of Israelites the law (5). Here the word ‘law’ refers to God’s story of redemption.

Deuteronomy is Moses recitation of the law. Moses reminds Israel of God’s story of their redemption, including God’s rules for living as the people of God.

As I pondered and meditated on all of this it occurred to me how important it is to tell God’s story of redemption to the up and coming generations. We should help them feel the redemption story as it comes through a person who has experienced God’s redemption. And then in the context of God’s story we can explain and outline God’s rules for living. We do a disservice to the Lord when we separated God’s story from God’s rules for living. When we do so we reduce faith to rules and miss the life interaction and relationship of God with His people.

I wonder how well I have done in telling God’s story to those around me and those who come behind me.

Lord, I pray for wisdom and the able craft to tell Your story to people I meet along the way of life. For Your glory I live and move and have my being. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

Sunday, October 18, 2020 - 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.