

The Weekly Word
October 26- November 1, 2020

Wow, by weeks end we will be in November... amazing how time flies. And this year we will have read all the Pentetuch along with chunks of the NT. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, October 26: Deuteronomy 8– The power of praise and thanksgiving...

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (10-14).

Oh, the power of heartfelt praise and reverent thanksgiving in keeping our heads on straight.

I suffer, like most other humans I know, from the regular temptation to think more highly of myself; to see my successes as mine and missing the contributions of others to the success I am measuring. As I do this on the everyday human plain, I can do so with respect to the Lord and His graces, which allow me to succeed.

Moses saw this as an issue for Israel, so following the inspiration of the Lord Moses penned verse 10: *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.* Praise, verbally adoring God for some good He has provided... reverence and thanksgiving and adoration of God for the good things He has given is a potent antidote to forgetting God's hand in our successes.

Lord, I have so much to be thankful for and so much to be grateful for. You have blessed me with health, education, a wonderful wife and family, a great church. You have given me of Your Spirit and led me to faith in You. You continue to reveal Yourself to me... I could go on and on.

Lord, I praise You for Your many goodnesses and ask that You help me be ever mindful that all I have is by Your grace. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, October 27: Deuteronomy 9– Just say No to selfrighteousness...

It is all too common to hear and see faithful Christ followers talk and act with a self-righteousness air. This is true for people of other faiths as well. Self-righteousness seems to be an affliction of human nature. But when it is coupled with religious righteousness it can be particularly ugly.

As Moses recounts Israel's history and God's laws Moses shreds any sense of righteousness or personal goodness in God's choice of Israel to be His people. *After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you,*

to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people (4-6).

Verse 6 nails God's argument shut: *Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.* God is pretty direct... not only is Israel not righteous, they are stiff-necked.

All of this shouts a reminder to me. As a human I am not very different from anyone in Israel in the time of Moses. I, too, do not deserve God's covenant of mercy, grace, redemption and more. And in my own way I am stiff-necked. And yet God reached into the muck of humanity and saved me

Reading this passage, reflecting on how I am no better than Israel spotlights for me, God's incredible love, mercy and grace toward me.

I am so blessed to be an heir with Jesus and part of God's family. So blessed and I cannot point to myself, only to the Lord God, my Redeemer.

Oh, God, so often I find myself in this same place, humbly recognizing Your great love to me in saving me... me, a stiff-neck, sin-filled human being. I am forever grateful... Oh, Lord, my God! In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, October 28: Deuteronomy 10– A heart that cares for human beings who need help...

As I was reading I noted these verses as they called out to my heart. *And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?(12-13)*

Such a helpful word highlighting how we are to live as God's children: Fear God, walk obediently, love and serve the Lord with all I have and obey God's Word. This is a great summary of how to live.

I thought... this is where God will have me camp and meditate.

Then I kept reading and verse 18 jumped out at me. *He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing (18).*

As part of God's self-revelation this verse gives a glimpse into God's heart... a heart that cares for human beings who need help.

Fatherless and widows... in the ancient world a child without a father was vulnerable as was the widow. Men basically controlled the purse strings; they had power and say. Women and children did not. So to be without male covering (fatherless and widow) put a person in a precarious position. So God stepped in and basically said, "I will be their father and their husband."

Aliens in the land also received the blessing of God as He clothed and fed them. God's heart says I have made room for them in my heart so make room for them in my country. It is verses like this one, and there are many, that cause me to cringe when my country reject aliens, separates families trying to come in and demeans them in speech. I particularly do not understand people of faith who believe the US has particular divine blessing yet approve of and advocates for policies like I mentioned one sentence previous. If we want to have the blessing of God we need to match our heartbeat with the heartbeat of God.

Oh, God teach me and teach my country what it is that makes You smile. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, October 29: Deuteronomy 11– Keep God’s decrees visible in your life...

Moses begins the chapter reminding Israel about God’s requirements to keep God’s commands. Then he reminds the people that their children did not experience the great triumphs of God, the exodus, defeat of the Egyptian army and the way God cared for them during the wandering years, etc. With that as a background Moses goes on to say:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth (18-21).

In Gestal shorthand God says, “Here are some things you can do to keep God’s decrees visible in your life and while you are at it, use every opportunity to teach the up and coming generations about God and God’s ways”.

The children were culturally Hebrew, but they had no first hand experience with the great events of the faith... so teach them and tell them every way you can.

Obviously, this is a word to parents about the importance of passing the faith along to our children and the next generations. Could it also have wider application? My children are now out of the house. Am I absolved from this passage?

I wonder if we could use a similar approach to reaching our friends and neighbors. I cannot force-teach them, but I could live my faith in obvious ways engendering questions and comments, which I then could seek to answer in winsome ways.

Attend Sunday worship regularly. If it conflicts with stuff, make worship a priority so my friends ask, “Why will you be late or can’t attend xyz?” and I can answer, “Worship is a priority for me....”

Celebrate not only the secular but religious aspects of holidays like Christmas and Easter visibly, again hopefully engendering comment or questions.

When you have discussions with friends, offer how your faith impacts your views, just as everyone’s beliefs affects their views.

Of course the above, particularly the last idea, needs to be done with grace and non-offensively. But if we are going to pass along our faith to others we have to speak about it in thought-provoking and engaging ways.

We are called by Jesus to let our light shine and that is really what Moses is teaching the people of Israel... shine your light so the younger generations see it and learn about the Lord. And that is good advice for me (and likely all of us).

Lord, continue to give me insight into how to share Your light with people of my world. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Friday, October 30: Deuteronomy 12– Don’t add or subtract from God’s word...

The chapter is all about how offerings, tithes and vows need to be eaten where God will place His name (i.e. the tabernacle and later the temple) but that animals slaughtered simply for food can be eaten anywhere. This is a very specific for Israel kind of chapter.

Moses concludes with this, *See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it (32).*

If we are going to be people of God's Word then we need to do as God commands. This short sentence points out two common errors when it comes to God's Word.

We are not to add to God's Word. I don't think the big issue is adding more 'books' to God's Word. Although that certainly applies to heretical Christian spin-off religions like Christian Science and Jehovah Witness, both of whom elevate other writings to equal or be above the Bible. I believe that the bigger challenge is adding human wisdom that moves beyond the biblical text. Often these additional items are meant to codify or help people understand what God is saying. Unfortunately, what they ultimately do is make us legalistic. Rules against body art or viewing movies come to mind quickly. What is more important for me is to search my heart to see if I have erected any add-ons to God's Word for my life or worse these add-ons as a tool to judge others...

The opposite warning is also given, not to take anything from God's Word. It is easy to read and reread the passages I like and skip over the hard passages. For me hard passages are one with judgment for sin and behaviors that are outside God's behavior norms. Again, do I have passages and teachings I avoid sticking instead to the ones that are comfortable for me? I might, which is one reason why I read the whole of the Bible yearly. A habit which helps me mitigate the temptation to only focus on passages I like.

A time of personal examination has come...

Lord, help me to be honest with myself and You and Your Word I pray... in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, October 31: Deuteronomy 13– Don't be lured from God by spiritual power...

Is the Lord God the only power who can do miracles in our world? The answer is 'no'. I wish this wasn't true but, alas, there are other spiritual beings and elemental forces that can produce miraculous events beyond human ability. One significant concern for the church in Africa, where I have traveled and taught, is that some people with health and fertility issues return to tribal shamans for potions and incantations. This isn't merely tribal superstition; some shaman's have real power to heal.

Here's the rub. Just because the shamans have real power does not mean we, as Christ followers, should engage them and worse, follow and believe in them. Closer to home, while I believe much of the New Age crystals and incantations are little more than hokey, some of it likely does have beyond human power.

Spiritual power and miracles are not proof of Almighty God's presence.

This issue was very alive for Israel moving into and displacing peoples in the Promised Land. Their gods, though no match for the Lord God Almighty, likely displayed beyond human power. Knowing this Moses warned the people not to fall for miracles as proof of God's presence. *If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him (1-4).*

So what do I make of all this?

My fidelity, my love and my trust must be to God who is revealed in scripture and who has been passed down to me by saints throughout the generations. I must respond judiciously to

miracles or claims of this or that spiritual power that does not come from the God revealed in scripture. Any other spiritual power, no matter how effective it might be, must be avoided. Since there are only two sources of spiritual power in our world, that which comes from the Lord and that which comes from Satan and counterfeits God's power I must, without question, shun any spiritual power that is not of God.

God, give me a discerning heart. Cause the voice of Your Holy Spirit within me to speak loudly and clearly so that I can see the counterfeits in the world, those spiritual powers that would seek to draw me away from You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, November 1, 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.