

The Weekly Word

November 23-29, 2020

Hello Reading the Bible readers. This week I begin a new format for my personal Bible reading. I sense a need for a new splash in my devotional routine. I will continue reading the Bible and writing my meditations, but I will follow a new format. First, I will lean heavily into the New Testament. Second, I will read only two chapters a week, so I will spend each day in a portion of a chapter asking myself 3 core questions about the text.

- What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)
- What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)
- What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I will begin reading Mark's gospel, probably my favorite gospel. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, November 23: Mark1:1-13 NIV2011

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

*"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"—*

³*"a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.' "*

⁴*And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*

⁷*And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

⁹*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

¹²*At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The passage dives right into the adult Jesus. After a few words of setup with the story of John, Jesus moves front and center and He will remain there until the end of the gospel.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Right away the passage tells us that Jesus is tied to OT prophecy. The story of Jesus is a continuation of the OT message.

I love verse 1, *The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God...* it is not a sentence, there is no verb. More than that it provides an insight into the trajectory of the gospel. It names Jesus *the Messiah, the Son of God*. These titles correspond to the narrative. In chapter 8 the disciples through Peter, their spokesperson, first recognize Jesus is *the Messiah* (8:29). Immediately following Jesus begins teaching them that He will suffer and die. As Jesus dies on the cross, the centurion guard calls out, *"Surely, this man was the Son of God!"* (15:39).

So in his opening Mark is able to foreshadow the person of Jesus through the two great titles, *the Messiah, the Son of God*

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

God is saying to me in this text that Jesus was God's plan of salvation from the beginning. Because Jesus fulfills OT prophecy, the story of Jesus, while new and unique, grows from what God has been doing the entire time.

This is reinforced in the words spoken to Jesus, *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."* God announces His pleasure and His favor on Jesus. Jesus is God's way of salvation. Jesus is the beloved son.

And I see in Jesus being sent into the wilderness that struggles will come to all of us who follow Jesus. Understanding our identity in God is the primary armor God grants us to survive the wilderness times of faith and life...

While I am NOT the son of God –only Jesus is the son, I am a son loved by God thanks to my adoption into God's family through faith in Jesus. This final thought is germinated in this text but grows from a wider understating of the NT.

Tuesday, November 24: Mark 1:14-28 NIV2011

¹⁴ *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.*

¹⁵ *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

¹⁶ *As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.*

¹⁹ *When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

²¹ *They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"*

²⁵ *"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man*

violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ *The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him."*

²⁸ *News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

This passage tells us of Jesus' initial foray into public ministry. He calls four disciples, speaks on the Sabbath in a synagogue in Capernaum and casts out an evil spirit. Mark's gospel moves at a breathless pace.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

There seems to be a few learnings from these passages. First, entrance into God's kingdom comes through repentance and belief in God's good news. No longer is hereditary the prime entrance into God's kingdom; now repentance (a turning from sin) and believe in God's good news (i.e. Jesus' message) are paramount.

Another learning is that the call to Jesus is to fish for people. People need to hear God's good news and the news source through which people can hear of God's good news are people who have already repented and believed.

Finally Jesus comes in authority and power. His teaching causes people to exclaim His authority as a teacher even greater or of a different quality than teachers of the law. And this happens before He cast out the demon. Jesus has power to back up His authority.

Jesus is not simple a man with wonderful teaching; He is a man with great authority!

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Spirit is reminding me that Jesus is a person of ACTION, His teachings are accompanied by action. He calls to them and they drop what they are doing and follow. He teaches powerfully and then backs up or substantiates His teachings by dramatic power over the kingdom of evil.

When I said 'yes' to Jesus I signed up to go where He goes and where He sends me. Faith in Jesus is not a ticket to comfort but to service. Where and what that may be is up to Jesus.

Jesus cares for the whole person. He teaches truth and dramatically brings healing when needed. God may or may not be grant me power in Jesus' name to heal another fellow human being or deliver them from evil influence. Still I need to keep the whole person in my view seeking not simply to 'save souls' rather to bring people, the whole person, into the embrace of Jesus and the blessing of the family of God.

Wednesday, November 25: Mark 1:29-45 NIV2011

²⁹ *As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.*

³² *That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.*

³³ *The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.*

³⁵ *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”*

³⁸ *Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.*

⁴⁰ *A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”*

⁴¹ *Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.*

⁴³ *Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” ⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

This passage tells us about the ‘always on the move’ pace of Jesus’ life. Jesus shows a desire to get the word out. He wants to proclaim the message of the good news, which it seems is generally accompanied by demonstrations of kingdom power that validates His teaching.

In the span of 45 verses in one chapter Jesus moves from His first appearance (His baptism) to having throngs of people coming to Him from ‘everywhere.’ His name and fame is spreading like ‘wildfire.’

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Reading this brief passage I found it difficult to choose one meaning for all Christians. Different paragraphs seem to carry their own teaching. Yet stepping back and looking at these verses as a whole, I see the lesson of yesterday being reinforced. Jesus cares for the whole person, body and spirit.

Still it is human need that drew people to Jesus. The people were not coming to hear great teaching; they descended upon Jesus because He worked healing miracles. In a world where medical science as we know it was non-existent, people had little or no options for healing when a malady overtook their human body. Basically, they let the disease run its course, maybe it might go away. More likely they learned to live with whatever the sickness and symptoms were. In the case of leprosy it meant being banished from society and Jewish faith rituals. Leprosy meant you were an outcast for the rest of your life. It is no surprise that people flocked to Jesus once word got around that He was a miracle-worker and healer.

Another observation from the text is the need for time away in solitude and prayer with the Father (35). The flow of the gospel has been breathless... baptism, wilderness, calling disciples, Sabbath teaching and casting out a demon, going home to Peter’s and needing to heal his

mother-in-law, the finally after the Sabbath concluded and evening descended, the *whole town gathered at the door* needing healing can freedom from demons. I am exhausted just listing the activities of Jesus leading up to and then upon that Sabbath day. I don't see much time for Sabbath rest.

And yet as tired as Jesus must have been he rose before all the others to carve out some solitary time in prayer with the Father (35). Our ultimate source of strength, truth, wisdom, compassion, kindness, plus all fruit of God's spirit and power to live for the Lord comes from one's connection with the Lord. For Jesus' connection with God through solitude and prayer was paramount. This example of Jesus is a lesson for the ages.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

Any number of lessons rose out of today's reading. What hits home the strongest for me is the example of Jesus finding solitude to be with the Father in prayer despite the frenetic pace of life.

Still after decades of walking with the Lord, I need to hear this lesson. When I am busy and stressed with a to do list that feels miles long, I press into my 'to do' list and often short change my solitude with the Lord. What is so clear for me to see, as I sit this morning, blurs in the frenzy of life.

As I consider the example of Jesus, I see a man who wants to be with the Father and who will make time to be with the Father even if it costs Him creature comforts. I don't pick up any sense of duty driving Jesus to pray early in the morning. Instead it appears to be His depth of relationship and a longing to be with the one who loves Him. I am reminded of verse 11, "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" Jesus knew He was loved and we long to spend time the one who loved Him.

Lord, this is the place I want to grow toward... that deep knowing I am Yours and the longing to be with You that comes with knowing... I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, November 26: Mark 2:1-12 NIV2011

¹ *A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.* ² *They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.* ³ *Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.* ⁴ *Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.* ⁵ *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

⁶ *Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,* ⁷ *"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

⁸ *Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?"* ⁹ *Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?"* ¹⁰ *But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."* *So he said to the man,* ¹¹ *"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."* ¹² *He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never*

seen anything like this!"

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The passage describes a dramatic healing. A paralyzed man is brought to Jesus by friends. The crowd is so large, that they carry the man to the roof of the home Jesus is in and dig a hole in the roof and lower the man right to Jesus. That is certainly a dramatic entrance. With all eyes on the man and Jesus, Jesus speaks words of forgiveness.

This comment sparks a confrontation with teachers of the law who are in the front seats. They are upset because God alone can forgive sins.

To make his point Jesus says, *Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?*¹⁰ *But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."* So he said to the man,¹¹ *"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."* At this the man is healed and walks out of the meeting in full view of everyone.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Two truths present themselves. One, Jesus can forgive sins.

Two, using the recognized teaching by the teachers of the law, since only God can forgive sins, then Jesus is saying he is God. This second truth is subtle and was likely missed by most in the crowd, still this is a significant step in Mark making his point (remember verse 1:1) that Jesus is the son of God, i.e. Jesus is God.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Holy Spirit is reinforcing the foundational Christian truth that Jesus, who is God, can and does forgive sins.

The Spirit is also reminding me that there is an interconnection between spiritual and physical. I certainly do not fully understand this link, but it is present. Somehow the paralysis of the man is cured when the man is forgiven from sins. Again, I don't understand this connection, how and when life works like this. But there it is...

Friday, November 27: Mark 2:13-17 NIV2011

¹³ *Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.* ¹⁴ *As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.*

¹⁵ *While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.* ¹⁶ *When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*

¹⁷ *On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

I love Mark's opening notice that crowds gathered around Jesus whenever He showed up. And that Jesus seizes the opportunity of a crowd to teach the people. The main target of the passage is the calling of Levi (Matthew). Levi then hosts a dinner for Jesus and His disciples. Levi invites his friends (other tax collectors and sinners) to attend as well.

The religious establishment is not happy that Jesus is consorting with the likes of tax collectors and sinners.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

The passage first reminds us that disciples follow Jesus, leaving our worldly situations if required so that we can follow Jesus.

The dinner party scene seems to be the primary intent of the passage. Jesus and His disciples dine with Levi's friends. As a tax collector it makes sense that Levi's friends are also tax collectors and sinners. Shunned by the 'religious' leaders as traitors, where else would Levi turn for companions? Jesus makes no distinctions; He dines with Levi and friends as He would dine with anyone.

Now the religious elite were watching Jesus so when they see His dining with these low lives they question Jesus' disciples about why Jesus would do this. You can hear the disdain in their question.

Jesus fires back with a powerful one-liner: *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

The point... only if you believe you are sick will you go to doctor (translation only if you believe you are a sinner will you seek healing and forgiveness in Jesus). People who think they are righteous or good enough will not come to Jesus. A person has to be willing to face their own sickness (sinfulness) to embrace Jesus. This connects with teachings in other places about the need for confession and repentance as part of turning to Jesus.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Spirit is telling me that I must remain humble and honest with myself... I am a sinner in desperate need of Jesus. I have to admit who I am.

I am thinking about an analogy with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). For AA to be effective a person has to be willing to admit that they are an alcoholic and they are always an alcoholic. A phrase associated with AA goes like this, "My name is... I am an alcoholic." Whether ones first day or 30th year AA participants recognize that they are alcoholics.

As a follower of Jesus I have a parallel reality... I am (and will always be) a sinner in need of God's grace. "My name is Bill and I am a sinner. Yes, I have been saved by Jesus, but I remain a sinner forever indebted to Jesus. May I NEVER forget this.

Saturday, November 28: Mark 2:18-22 NIV2011

¹⁸ Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

¹⁹ Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. ²⁰ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

²¹ "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will

pull away from the old, making the tear worse. ²² And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The first portion of the passage for today is all about fasting. And while Jesus’ disciples didn’t fast while they were with Jesus, it is clear that after Jesus is gone they will fast, just as disciples of Pharisees fast.

In life no one would put new wine, which needs to ferment into only wineskins, which are hard and brittle because the pressure of fermenting will cause them to break. You put new wine in new wineskins so that the subtle skins can expand as the wine ferments.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

The first section tells us that fasting will be a religious practice for Jesus followers throughout time.

The word picture of new wineskins for Jesus ministry teaches that His ministry is new and to pour it into the old container of Judaism would cause it to break and its precious contents would spill out and be lost. Thus the ministry/faith of Jesus needs a new container for the new ministry/faith that will grow from Jesus.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I have never practiced fasting in any discernable fashion. I have fasted on occasion, but I cannot call it a practice I typically or regularly employ in my spiritual life. I pray, I read scripture, I worship on the Lord’s day, I try to hold a Sabbath, but fasting is not a tool I reach for very often.

Writing this causes me to think that I should be more regular in pursuing fasting as a spiritual discipline.

Honestly, I feel a reticence within me to say ‘yes’ to fasting. Is this insolence or disobedience? Could be and I need to sit and pray and deal with this before the Lord...

Sunday, November 29, 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 an audio link to my sermons, <https://livinghopect.org/resources/audio-sermons>. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days. We also livestream our full services which are up on our YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgKURRsbX92qqIFgDF1iRWA>