

**The Weekly Word**  
April 15-21, 2019

Happy Spring. Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

**Monday, April 15: Nahum 3- What goes around, comes around ...**

The message of Nahum ends on a dire note. *Nothing can heal you; your wound is fatal. All who hear the news about you clap their hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?* (19).

The phrase, 'what goes around, comes around' came to mind. Nineveh was ruthless in how she dealt with foes. Also, it seems that Nineveh's rulers may have been harsh to citizens as well. God saw. God watched. God noted. And then God judged. What the Ninevites dished out, God did to them.

This got me thinking... how we live matters. Jesus in Matthew 7:2b says *with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*. The Ninevites used a cruel measure and God used it back on them.

I understand I cannot earn my way into God's good graces, but as His child God wants me to live a life that honors Him. This means living my life filled with the Lord, with the Fruit of the Spirit, filled with grace and love. My measure should be kind, compassionate, caring, hopeful, and helpful. My measure should be filled with Jesus.

I can't do this on my own. I need God, the Holy Spirit, in me, empowering me and leading me. When I live for myself and in my own strength, I am no different than the Ninevites. But as I live with and for Jesus, I use the measure God delights and God desires.

*Lord, I deserve death and destruction like the Ninevites... but through Jesus, You saved me. I am far from perfect, far from even good, still you love me. You sent Jesus to die for me. You have so blessed me. Lord, I don't deserve to be called Your son, but that is what You call me and I am forever grateful. Words cannot convey my thanks and love. In and through Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 16: Habakkuk 1- History through God's eyes...**

God is sovereign. God is in control. God decides which nations rise and which fall. God is over all. Do I believe this?

If I do, then I must read history as a display of God's sovereignty.

The answer Habakkuk receives is that God is going to use Babylon –that wretched warring people –to judge Israel. God ordained Israel's impending defeat. Even though Israel was God's beloved, they had turned from God and He was now going to punish them through the sword of Babylon.

It wasn't that Babylon was 'better.' It was that God was working His will, chastising His people.

God can and does chastise me when I stray from His path just as He did to Judah. The writer to the Hebrews writes: *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover,*

*we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:7-11).*

*O, Lord God, help me to discern when You are disciplining me and then to learn from Your discipline so that I may be trained in righteousness. To be a faithful follower is my desire. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, April 17: Habakkuk 2- Awed into silence...**

So many thoughts... so many places to stop and ponder and think.

*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (14).* One of the great Old Testament prophetic words, how we people of faith in Jesus long for that day. To be engulfed in the glory of God... oh, my!

Then there were all the words (woes) to Nineveh about ill-gotten gains, about building its wealth and power on the back of others. Hasn't every nation done that to one extent or another? It was difficult to entertain thoughts about my country and how we have done that. Do we deserve punishment and the wrath of God? Probably so.

And then there were the ending verses of the chapter:

*"Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it."*

*The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him (18-20).*

What idols do I make for myself? I don't have any carved images. I don't expect a stone to speak. But are there things I trust in more than God for my present or future wellbeing???

This is difficult for me to answer. Difficult because I wrestle with what is good stewardship and what is God-dependence. For example, I am saving for my retirement, the time of life when I cannot or do not work for money to support my living. (I don't think a person ever retires from living for Jesus/ministry.) But we do retire from earning an income to support our living.

I try not to monitor my retirement fund regularly; I save and let it accumulate hopefully in wise investments. Can my nest-egg become an idol? These are the kinds of questions I wrestle with regarding idols. I want to be a wise steward, but I don't want to find that my finances are a false idol. I believe I trust God for my future as well as my salvation. This is a balance I must regularly strike

The final sentence makes me tremble. *The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.* It is as if the prophet reminds us, people are constantly tempted to create their own idols, still God is present. He is in his temple. And before Him we will be utterly silent; because in God's presence we become overwhelmed by Who He is and His greatness to the point that we are speechless. Awe, wonder, fear, respect, delight, joy... all course through our veins at being in God's presence.

*God, why would I want to trust in anything else but You? Forgive me when I do and straighten me out when I do. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Thursday, April 18: Habakkuk 3- God is with me so I can rejoice ...**

The Book of Habakkuk concludes with a prayer. This prayer helps me to grasp prayer when things are not going well.

*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. ... (17-19).*

Habakkuk is honest... he lists some of what is wrong. I hear in his words the cry, "Why Lord, why? Why are you allowing this hard time?"

I have been there. You have been there. When prayers are not answered as hoped. When things go from good to bad or bad to worse. When it seems that you have the anti-Midas touch, instead of things turning to gold (good), the good turns bad. When the doctor calls with test results you don't want to hear. When the police call, there's been an accident... we have your son/daughter in custody. To some degree or another, we have all been there. We wonder, why God? Where are you, God? I thought you would protect me, God?

Habakkuk is in one of those times; crops have failed, herds have disappeared. He is honest with God about what is happening. BUT that is not the end of his prayer. He is not simply whining and complaining.

Habakkuk seemingly wills himself to praise. Maybe he stepped outside and looked to the heavens on a starry night and saw the hand of God in the majesty of the sky? Maybe a still small voice whispered in his spirit, this is not the end, I have chapters of goodness still to be written in your book. Maybe he remembered another time when all seemed bleak but God came through?

I don't know what effected the change but it happened. He cries out: *yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.*

God is with me so I can rejoice and be joyful! God is my strength, God is my stay, God is my support. He IS WITH ME. I am HIS.

And that is true for me as well. I am HIS. God is my strength, God is my stay, God is my support, so I can rejoice and be joyful!

*Lord, to this I shout, Halleluiah! Amen!!!*

### **Friday, April 19: Zephaniah 1- We are a mess...**

Zephaniah, the great, great grandson of King Hezekiah, speaks God's word to the present king of Judah, Amon. And what a word it is.

From the first syllable to the last it is a word of utter judgment. God will sweep humanity away and Judah is not protected. *"I will sweep away both man and beast; I will sweep away the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea— and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble." "When I destroy all mankind on the face of the earth," declares the LORD, "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will destroy every remnant of Baal worship in this place, the very names of the idolatrous priests— (3-4).*

My immediate reaction is ouch, oh my... there is not a single word of hope or mercy or grace in this word from the Lord. How angry the Lord must be. How far down the path of wrong Judah must have traveled. God does not punish indiscriminately.

I found myself thinking about my present day. The world continues to live far off the rails from God's ways. We kill innocent children in the womb in the hundreds of thousands per year

in my country alone. Racism, genocide, terrorism, shootings, bombings, sex anywhere, everywhere with anyone, pornography, sex trafficking, 36-40 million slaves in various forms worldwide, political corruption, disregard for human dignity and human rights, exploitation of the poor and marginalized... we have strayed FAR from God. I'm sure these are simply the tip of the iceberg. Our world is no better than the world of Zephaniah's day.

Sadly, Zephaniah sees that Judah is no better than the world. This led me to consider the church? Are we living more God honoring lives than people who do not follow the Lord and His word?

For me this is a more complicated question to ponder. In my church, I know many people who live lives infused with the love of God. None of us are perfect but I do see people living closer to God's standard. BUT and this is a significant but I also see vestiges large and small of non-Christ-like influences. Honoring life from conception to natural death is under assault in the church as a whole, as is sexual purity. Professing believers have enslaved others, taken advantage of the poor. And sex scandals in major denominations show how corrupt we can be. I don't know which is worse the heinous acts of clergy or cover-ups by upper church officials? So I see in the church people seeking to live faithfully and people being as devious and any non-Christ follower.

Maybe God's word to Judah through the quill of Zephaniah is a word to us today as well. Hopefully Zephaniah will issue a call to repentance and not just speak a word judgment.

I believe in Jesus God has issued a call to repentance. Jesus invites us to come to Him, be filled by the Spirit and learn to live a life that honors God and others, by loving God and loving others...

*O God, help me to be faithful. Cause my stomach to churn by sin in the world and help me to be a voice for love and dignity and You in my world. I pray this in Jesus name. Amen.*

### **Saturday, April 20: Zephaniah 2- An offer of repentance...**

I wondered yesterday if Zephaniah would offer a call to repentance. Low and behold the opening words of chapter 2 are precisely that... a call, an invitation to repentance. *Gather together, gather yourselves together, you shameful nation, before the decree takes effect and that day passes like windblown chaff, before the LORD's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the LORD's wrath comes upon you. Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger (1-3).*

As I read on God's offer of repentance extends to Judah but not to the surrounding countries. Israel was a privileged nation, she was the Lord's own people. God, over and over again, reaches out with an invitation to return.

Mirrored in Israel is God's invitation to His people in every time and place to return, to come home as the prodigal came home in Jesus' famous parable (see Luke 15).

One of the wonderful truths about God is that His arms are always open wide to any child who comes home... I cannot count the number of times I have recognized my sin and my need and turned to the Lord. Each and every time God has greeted me with open arms of grace, mercy and love. Every time. Oh to be loved by God.

I sit here on Easter eve, realizing for the umpteenth time the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. I sit amazed.

Today, Holy Saturday is the in between day. Yesterday we marked Jesus' death on a cross. Tomorrow we celebrate his resurrection. Today we wait. As we wait, Jesus is setting captives

free. The Apostles' Creed writes, "He (Jesus) was crucified, died and was buried, he descended to the dead and on the third day rose again." Holy Saturday, a day of waiting for us, Jesus is setting free all the saints who died before the crucifixion, he is liberating the saints of old who have waited for him.

Tomorrow I get to sing the praises of my resurrected Lord. Today I wait, knowing God is doing His thing and His arms are opened wide to everyone of us prodigals who turns for home and comes back to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*Thanks be to God, we have the victory, we have forgiveness, we have redemption through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen and Amen.*

### **Sunday, April 21, 2019, EASTER 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](mailto:office@LivingHopeCT.org).*

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.