

The Compass

Week 31

OT Readings: 2 Chron. 26:1 - Ezra 2:70

NT Readings: Rom. 13:1 – 1 Cor. 2:5

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- The Chronicler sees these kings through the lenses of faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God. For those faithful comes God's blessing; for those unfaithful they meet God's resistance and discipline.
- Chronicles ends in tragedy. Jerusalem is taken, the temple and city destroyed, the people and the last king exiled to Babylon in disgrace.¹
- Notice the repeat of the Cyrus' edict in 2 Chron. 36 and Ezra 1. The edict marks the end of the exile and the beginning return to the land.

New Testament

- Romans concludes with Paul addressing some practical concerns about how they should do life together as God's people in Rome. As throughout, his concern has been with their unity and their faithfulness to the gospel in Rome.
- In Romans 15, Paul gives some perspective on his own ministry; chapter 16 concludes the letter with greetings to friends.
- Paul wastes little time in directly addressing the many issues at Corinth. The Corinthian spiritual pride in "wisdom and knowledge" is immediately countered with God's perspective of things – the "wisdom" of the crucified Messiah.

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

1 Cor. 1:18-2:2. Jesus came declaring that the "kingdom of God" had arrived *in Him*. Yet, even in Jesus' own time many who had clung to the hope this kingdom might actually come in their own day missed it. It simply didn't look like what they thought that it should. It was and is the "upside down kingdom" that radically challenges all other ways of thinking, valuing and behaving; it is radically upside down from the world around it.²

Perhaps nothing reveals God to us more clearly than the cross which stands at the center of the "upside down kingdom." It reveals love that is beyond comprehension, sacrifice that stuns us into silence. It reveals the God who simply would not accept "No" as the final answer to His overtures of love.³ It reveals a God who having gone as far as a cross now holds up this cross as evidence that He is committed to giving us "all things" (Rom. 8:32)!

Yet it was and is still "foolishness" and a stumbling block to us because it decimates our pride and reveals our selfishness. It demands a response, we cannot be neutral or indifferent in light of THIS God, the one who gave Himself fully there. No wonder it was Paul's message and is ours' as well.

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Rom. 13:11-14. As with Romans 8 and Galatians 5, "flesh" for Paul is not an "it" within the believer (as the NLT translation "evil desires" might imply), rather flesh is the world system surrounding us, the *old* way of life which we pursued before Jesus. No longer do we go there. Rather, we are to "clothe ourselves with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Herein is the key to victory in the Christian life even in the midst of the very "fleshy" world in which we live. To focus on what we are not to do is simply putting our feet on the road to failure. Walking with Jesus is not behavioral change, being a better person. Rather, it is a radical re-orientation of everything in our lives to Jesus. To "wrap ourselves up in Jesus like an overcoat" is to immerse ourselves in His life, His stuff, His ways, His thinking, His love. If we do, says Paul, there will be no room in our lives for anything less.

Difficult Question of the Week

2 Chron. 32:20-31.⁴ Q. “What does it mean for God to ‘test’ people?”

Several places in the OT refer to God’s “testing” as a means to determine, as here, “all that was in his (Hezekiah’s) heart.” Testing can involve something God asks, as in the case of Abraham/Isaac, or God not acting, as in not driving out the Canaanites. Our response to circumstances may be the primary way God searches the heart.⁵ A test puts a person into a new situation or circumstance whereby God can see what is true about them as they *respond*, will they be faithful or not? While it may seem only a negative concept, in reality it creates opportunity for us to know God better as He meets us in life situations, reveals Himself to us and reveals us to us, even when we fail.

In Hezekiah’s case, the test concerned his pride reflected in his refusal to give God His due regarding the events and the blessings following the Assyrian defeat and Hezekiah’s healing (2 Chron. 32:20-25). The Babylonian envoys created the circumstance whereby God could see if Hezekiah would acknowledge God in it all.⁶ Hezekiah failed (2 Kings 20:12-15). Yet, failure was not the end; God worked with Hezekiah to bring him to humility eventually (2 Chron. 32:26).⁷

So, does *God* test us? Perhaps. But regardless, the combination of circumstances and our responsiveness to God in obedience or not gives God clear insight into our hearts.⁸

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¹ The exile actually took place in phases. Daniel and others were taken (BC 605), a significant portion of Judah’s societal elite (BC 597 – includes Ezekiel), a major deportation with the cities’ fall (BC 586) and a lesser group later (BC 581). The exile was devastating in many ways, not the least of which is the depopulation, physical destruction and human suffering. The people lived in the religious deception that because they were God’s people, Jerusalem was God’s chosen city and their kings were David’s heirs that no ill could come to them; regardless of their unfaithfulness and sin. Jeremiah battles this error (e.g., Jeremiah 7), but to no avail. The final tragedy that was the exile shook them to the core – why has this happened to us? It was this desperate measure taken by God that made it even remotely possible for a faithful remnant to emerge during the exilic period. The shaking created the possibility that they would “come to their senses.” Some did, those who responded to God’s “stirring.” (Ezra 1:5)

² But in fact it is the world that is “upside down,” out of adjustment with God and His ways.

³ Despite the habitual rejection of His people throughout the OT. Surely, He would abandon the experiment! Unrelenting, shameless, He loves us from the horror of the Roman cross.

⁴ Parallel account is in 2 Kings 20:12f.

⁵ Gen. 22. Deut. 8:2. Judges 2:21-23.

⁶ While we are not told what it meant for God to “leave” Hezekiah as part of the test, but it may simply be a way of saying that God “stepped back” to watching how Hezekiah would respond.

⁷ Never presume on grace! Failure always has negative consequences and it is only that God is so incredibly gracious that second tries are possible; but we should never assume so. If you hold such an assumption, what does that say about *your* heart?

⁸ Why does this matter? Our response to Him determines what will be His next specific steps with us. Obviously God is committed to us. Not only does He want us to grow in knowing Him, He also wants to entrust us with responsibilities in His kingdom mission. Can He trust us? He will not put us into situations that are dangerous for us (“Please don’t send me to Africa!”) if we are unprepared and unresponsive in our relationship with Him. He will continue to interact with us in life to “stretch us” into the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29) and expand our faith-quotient so we can do ever greater things. For us, the bottom line is, “What am I learning about God and myself in all of this?”