

The Compass

Week 39

OT Readings: Isaiah 43:14 – 62:5

NT Readings: Ephesians 3:1 – Philippians 2:18

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Notice how the “nations” are brought into what God is doing through His servant and servants: “Note in these oracles how Yahweh’s “servant, Israel,” narrows down to one servant who will stand in for Israel and redeem both Israel and the nations.” There is to be a new “exodus” accomplished through the redeeming work of Yahweh’s suffering servant, 52:12-53:12.¹
- Isaiah is truly a book of hope, consolation and a renewed future; all brought about by the redeeming God.

New Testament

- Eph. 3:14-21 is a wonderful prayer, worth some time meditating on, ask the Holy Spirit to help!
- Watch for the repetition of “lead your life, live your life” through Ephesians 4-6; while this is certainly about individuals, notice the importance in how we do life together.² Also notice the relational emphasis through out: Body life, not like Gentiles, husband-wife, against the powers of darkness, etc. These chapters are about God’s power to transform and reshape life according to His ways and will.³
- Phil. 1:27-2:18 are a unit; be sure to read on through the end of chapter one to see Paul’s thought flow.

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Phil. 2:5-11. While we might overuse superlatives, one can hardly overestimate the awe this passage inspires. What it tells us about God is stunning and immensely challenging: Paul holds up Jesus’ life - seen in His self-emptying and denial as the way we should do life and do our life together.⁴ Jesus’ “attitude,” His life orientation and purpose, is seen in 2:6-8. He left heaven, leaving behind His divine privileges; He entered our world as a human.⁵ Not just any human, but He postures Himself as a slave. *Then, it says, He humbled Himself!* Even to death, and not just any death, but the most horrific kind of suffering and degradation available in the first century – death on a Roman cross.

Let’s be clear about Jesus. He did these things not just as a way to accomplish His purpose of redemption; He did these things because **this is the kind of God He is** – One who willingly denies Himself to express His heart and love for others. This servant-heartedness is no affectation, no short term inconvenience to be set aside when He returns to heaven. He is a servant God: before He became a man, as a man, and now as He sits enthroned as Lord of all. In fact, it is Jesus’ servant-heart and servanthood that enables God to exalt Him as the One with “the name above all names.” He is given this place of honor not because He somehow earned it through suffering, rather because He *showed* who He was in His suffering. Now God has chosen the greatest servant to rule the universe.⁶

Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

Eph. 5:15-18. Paul’s concern beginning in Eph. 4:1 is with how believers do life, “walk” (NAU). They are to take care, watch carefully; to be intentional and deliberate. This is no self-help program, no attempt at good works, rather a lifestyle of *empowered responsiveness* to the Spirit. “Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit” is a command and to be a constant way of life, “Let the Holy Spirit fill and control you” (NLT).

It is to be a moment by moment walk with the Spirit, responding to Him in every situation, taking advantage of “every opportunity” as He leads us.⁷ Because this is a relationship with God the Spirit, there is a relaxation, a restfulness as we walk in this way. Is your lifestyle marked by His presence and power? Does He have control over you, over me?⁸

Difficult Question of the Week

Eph. 6:10-20. “How are we to understand ‘spiritual warfare’?”

Our secular culture has long denied that there is any reality but what can be seen.⁹ The Biblical worldview says otherwise; there are unseen forces among us and in vital connection with the seen world. How are we to understand them? Paul acknowledges that we will struggle with them, that we are to do so with the Lord's strength, fully armed to stand and resist their work. He likens our preparation to armor; especially important is the Word of God, truth (6:14, 17) and Spirit directed and empowered prayer (6:18). There is much popular writing in this area; some excellent, some flaky.¹⁰ The reality is that Scriptural teaching leaves a lot of gaps in our understanding of this realm. Therefore perhaps our best posture is this: we should be *aware* of our spiritual enemies, but *impressed* with God. Fascination with this realm may turn out to be a snare; yet ignorance may keep us from being effective in our warfare. Fear is not an option, but triumphalism is foolishness. Failing to discern what is occurring in the supernatural is not a Biblical option, but "looking for demons under every rock" is beyond the Bible as well.¹¹

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¹ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 183.

² In more literal versions, e.g., the NAU, Paul repeats the word "walk;" the idea is captured by the NLT, "live your life."

³ That means everything in life, all spheres and all relationships.

⁴ Phil. 2:7 reveals the "self-emptying" (kenosis) of Jesus in laying aside His divine privileges and prerogatives and has been a passage of deep theological reflection over the centuries.

⁵ Again, "attitude" hardly does justice to the Greek word used here, *phroneo*. The word reveals something about Jesus' life purpose, orientation and way of seeing Himself and the world; a perspective that determines the way He lives.

⁶ It is as though God looked throughout the universe to find someone He could trust to rule things and He found that one in His servant-Son. Also, it is interesting that the great suffering servant passage in Isaiah falls in this same week! Take time to read it again and reflect on Jesus the suffering servant.

⁷ The larger context makes this passage even more powerful. Eph. 5:19 begins a series of participle clauses that describe the Spirit's work including our worship together (5:19-20) and our relationships (5:21-6:9). The three relational sets (husband-wife, parent-child and master-slave) are not random but represent the Roman household code, the basis for the Roman legal system. The Spirit is to empower and control all of our relationships and the whole of our lives.

⁸ Jesus is certainly no difficult task-master; His "yoke is kind and gentle" because *He* is humble and gentle (Matt. 11:28-30). Let's ask Him how we can live in His rest and learn from Him! The Spirit indwells and empowers us *today* for that purpose.

⁹ Modernism and rationalism sought to remove any category called "supernatural" from how we see the world by relegating it to the "pre-modern" and therefore archaic and unenlightened. Interestingly, if anything can be made of the ongoing interest in the "paranormal" in popular culture it seems that Postmodernism is more open to unseen realities.

¹⁰ Some fictional accounts (e.g., Frank Peretti's novels, including *This Present Darkness*) have been helpful to alert us to the reality of this conflict but should not be used as a "manual" to understand this realm. Here are a couple titles I would recommend as starters in understanding this area: Dean Sherman, *Spiritual Warfare for Every Christian*; Ed Murphy, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare: Revised and Updated* (Thomas Nelson, 2003). Clinton Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare* (Baker, 1997).

¹¹ I believe the Biblical paradigm is essentially found in Gen. 1-3. God gave dominion over the created order to humanity and that mandate remains ours. In fact, the Great Commission and the Kingdom of God are the New Covenant mandate to reclaim the world and bring it under God's loving rule and purpose. While it is clear Biblically and from our experience that the world does lie under the power of the enemy (1 John 5:19), he was never given legal rights to the world and his power is only in his ability to deceive us, individually and corporately (the many "-isms" of the world). The devil cannot make us do it, but he has been effective at deceiving us into cooperating with him against God.