

Deal Pentecostal Church Sermon Outlines 2016

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January:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. Rev.4:8

Sunday 3rd January 2016. Ps.56. Rev.4:1

I was in the Spirit

In the Bible there are many people (including Jesus^{Matt.4:1}) who are described as being led by the Spirit. Simeon was one of them: *Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.*^{Lk.2:25-27}

The theme for this year's Memory Verses is *Heavenly Songs* – songs that are being sung in heaven right now. As we learn these heavenly songs and use them in our own prayers and worship they will help us join in the heavenly worship of the angels and with the saints who have already been promoted to glory. *But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*^{Heb.12:22-24} We should be so heavenly minded that we can be the best earthly use. It is superficial “spirituality” that is of no earthly use, being heavenly minded is being truly spiritual and is the only really effective way of living on earth - Jesus is the best model of true spirituality: *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*^{Lk.2:52}

The theme of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is true spirituality and understanding the Gift of the Holy Spirit. When we understand that the Holy Spirit Himself is given to us, resides within us and empowers us, the actual **gifts** of the Holy Spirit are almost irrelevant. *But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him... Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price.*^{1Cor.6:17-20} Paul wanted the Church to understand about being spiritual and warned about being carnal and grieving the Holy Spirit. *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?*^{1Cor.3:1-4} *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*^{Eph.4:30} Although the Corinthian Church had the “**gifts**” of the Holy Spirit, they didn't understand about the **Gift** of the Holy Spirit. *Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.*^{1Cor.12:1} Actually the word “*gift*” is not used in this verse and Paul was really saying that he wants them to be informed about **the** Holy Spirit. Another version puts it this way: *What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable.*^{1Cor.12:1}

John gives us insight into being led by the Spirit (being in the Holy Spirit). *After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven... At once I was in the Spirit.*^{Rev.4:1-2} Here, John saw a Door open in heaven and Jesus is that Door.^{Jn.10:7-9} When we can see Jesus in heaven we will be “*in the Spirit*”. **We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus:** *Since we are surrounded by so many examples of faith, we must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially sin that distracts us. We must run the race that lies ahead of us and never give up. We must focus on Jesus, the source and goal of our faith. He saw the joy ahead of him, so he endured death on the cross and ignored the disgrace it brought him. Then he received the highest position in heaven, the one next to the throne of God. Think*

about Jesus, who endured opposition from sinners, so that you don't become tired and give up.^{Heb.12:1-3} Not only will we be “in the Spirit” when we see Jesus but when we are “in the Spirit” we will hear Jesus speak to us: *On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard... and when I turned I saw... When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!”*^{Rev.1:10-18}

Our spirit is our God-conscious part of us and our soul is our personality – the part of us that makes us a unique person. So when we are born-again, God creates a new spirit (because the old spirit is dead). *I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.*^{Ez.11:19-20} But our soul needs saving and sanctifying. *Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*^{Jas.1:21} *My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*^{Jas.5:19-20} Our soul and spirit are very closely linked and have similar emotions and feelings. Only God's Word can accurately divide between our soul and spirit. *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*^{Heb.4:12} This is why we need to study God's Word and hide it in our heart: *How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word. I have tried hard to find you—don't let me wander from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. I praise you, O LORD; teach me your decrees. I have recited aloud all the regulations you have given us. I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches. I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways. I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word.*^{Ps.119:9-16}

Let us determine that this year we will walk in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit not our flesh. To be led by the Holy Spirit is the birth-right of all God's children. *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*^{Rom.8:14-17} When we walk by the Spirit we will be dominated by our spirit (our post-converted spiritual nature) not our soul or flesh (our pre-converted nature). *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*^{Ps.42:5} *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*^{Gal.5:16-26}

As we keep singing the heavenly songs and praising Jesus, we will live in the heavenly realms where Jesus is on the Throne. *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*^{Col.3:1-4}

This is the place of victory and blessing, so let's make our New Year's resolution to walk *in the Spirit* – and keep to it!

Sunday 10th January 2016. Ps.56. Jn.10

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me.^{Jn.10:27-28}

Last week we saw that there is a Door open in heaven^{Rev.4:1} and that Door is Jesus. *I'm like a gate. Anyone who enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out. And he will find plenty of food.*^{Jn.10:9} Because Jesus is that “Open Door in heaven” all of heaven’s resources are available for us. We can walk right into God’s Presence and Glory - the spiritual dimension of the heaven realms. This is not for the “mystics” or the superficial “heavenly-minded” people who are no earthly use – this is for Believers who are bold enough to take God at His Word and act on it.

God has freely provided everything we need to be truly spiritual without special knowledge or the denial of the good gifts He has given us: *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*^{2Pet.1:3-4} The early Church faced problems of Gnosticism (the belief that special knowledge is required to be “spiritual”) and Asceticism (the belief that abstinence from enjoying natural life is required to be “spiritual”). These heresies are still around in the church today and are attractive to people who are not Bible-literate. True spirituality can’t be fast-tracked by secrets or angels or visions or prophecy or abstinence. True spirituality is maturity and comes from working out our salvation,^{Phil.2:12} and from keeping on doing the routine work of fellowshiping with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, fellowshiping with other Believers and fellowshiping with the Word of God: *Because of this, make every effort to add integrity to your faith; and to integrity add knowledge; to knowledge add self-control; to self-control add endurance; to endurance add godliness; to godliness add Christian affection; and to Christian affection add love. If you have these qualities and they are increasing, it demonstrates that your knowledge about our Lord Jesus Christ is living and productive. If these qualities aren't present in your life, you're short-sighted and have forgotten that you were cleansed from your past sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, use more effort to make God's calling and choosing of you secure.*^{2Pet.1:5-10} And so Paul’s advice is still relevant today: *Don't tolerate people who try to run your life, ordering you to bow and scrape, insisting that you join their obsession with angels and that you seek out visions. They're a lot of hot air, that's all they are. They're completely out of touch with the source of life, Christ, who puts us together in one piece, whose very breath and blood flow through us. He is the Head and we are the body. We can grow up healthy in God only as he nourishes us. So, then, if with Christ you've put all that pretentious and infantile religion behind you, why do you let yourselves be bullied by it? ...Do you think things that are here today and gone tomorrow are worth that kind of attention? Such things sound impressive if said in a deep enough voice. They even give the illusion of being pious and humble and ascetic. But they're just another way of showing off, making yourselves look important. So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.*^{Col.2:18-3:4}

God's Kingdom is like our NHS, which has at its heart these three core principles – *it should meet the needs of everyone; it should be free at the point of delivery; it should be based on clinical need, not ability to pay!*

The Gospel meets the need of everyone – with salvation: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.*^{Rom.1:16} The effect of the Gospel is that people's lives are changed - from death to life, darkness to light, hopelessness to hopefulness, cursedness to blessedness. *For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*^{Jer.29:11} *However, you are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, people who belong to God. You were chosen to tell about the excellent qualities of God, who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not God's people, but now you are. Once you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy*^{1Pet.2:11}

The Gospel is free at the point of delivery. Neither God nor His blessings can be bought with money: *Come, all of you who are thirsty. Come and drink the water I offer to you. You who do not have any money, come. Buy and eat the grain I give you. Come and buy wine and milk. You will not have to pay anything for it. Why spend money on what is not food? Why work for what does not satisfy you? Listen carefully to me. Then you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the richest food there is.*^{Is.55:1-2} The currency of God's Kingdom is Faith not gold or silver and the only way to "buy" anything from God is by faith – by trusting Him. Nothing else can ever be exchanged for "goods" in God's kingdom: *No one can buy back the life of another. No one can pay God for his own life, because the price of a life is high. No payment is ever enough.*^{Ps.49:7-8} *When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought.*^{Acts.8:18-22} But we can have credit with God: *what I desire is that more be credited to your account.*^{Phil.4:17}

The Gospel is based on our need, not our ability to pay! *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*^{Matt.11:28-30} *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.*^{Rev.22:17}

For us Believers the new creation realities are just that – Realities. But they remain theory unless we believe them and live them. So let's continue to **keep our eyes fixed on Jesus:** *Since we are surrounded by so many examples of faith, we must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially sin that distracts us. We must run the race that lies ahead of us and never give up. We must focus on Jesus, the source and goal of our faith. He saw the joy ahead of him, so he endured death on the cross and ignored the disgrace it brought him. Then he received the highest position in heaven, the one next to the throne of God. Think about Jesus, who endured opposition from sinners, so that you don't become tired and give up.*^{Heb.12:1-3} Let's continue to **keep listening to Jesus' voice** as we follow Him. Let's continue to **keep in step with the Holy Spirit** knowing that we will never perish. Let's continue to **see Jesus in heaven** at the right hand of the Father. *Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honour at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.*^{Col.3:1-2} *Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.*^{Phil.4:8-9}

Praise God for the privilege of being called by His name!^{1Pet.4:16}

Sunday 17th January 2016. Ps.62. Jn.11

How do you pray?

When Jesus prayed, He knew that God always heard Him: *Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me."*^{Jn.11:41-42} This was because Jesus only said what God said and did what God did: *I speak just what the Father has taught me. The One who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases him.*^{Jn.8:28-29} So Jesus explained, *"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants."*^{Jn.5:19-21} Jesus also prayed God's will: *He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."*^{Lk.22:41-42}

In many ways Jesus was like us: *Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.*^{Heb.2:17} but in many ways Jesus was not like us – He was and is, eternally God, co-equal with the Father: *In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.*^{Jn.1:1-4} Because Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and other religions deny Jesus' Deity, they are false religions. *No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.*^{Jn.6:46} *I and the Father are one.*^{Jn.10:30} Even though God called some people "gods," **we will always be the created and never become the Creator.** *Jesus replied, "It is written in your own Scriptures that God said to certain leaders of the people, 'I say, you are gods!' And you know that the Scriptures cannot be altered. So if those people who received God's message were called 'gods,' why do you call it blasphemy when I say, 'I am the Son of God'?" After all, the Father set me apart and sent me into the world.*^{Jn.10:34-36}

So Jesus did have a big advantage over us when it comes to living and working for God – and even praying to God. However, Jesus, though truly God, did not use His deity to His own advantage: *In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*^{Phil.2:5-11} Jesus only began His Miraculous Ministry after His baptism and empowerment by the Holy Spirit^{Lk.3:21-22} because **He relied on the Holy Spirit's anointing not His own Deity.** *One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy." Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his public ministry... Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness... Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power.*^{Lk.3:21-23;4:1;14}

Although Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, when He was born as a baby He was truly human. Kathryn Khulman said: *Jesus was as much God as if He were not Man and as much Man as if He were not God! And Jesus still had to learn obedience! Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.*^{Heb.5:8-9} **However, the same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus**

and who raised Him from the dead, resides within every Believer: *And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, your spirit is alive because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.*^{Rom.8:10-11} **This means that we too can to live for God and work for God – and even pray to God** – like Jesus did. The same Holy Spirit who comforted, counselled, directed, empowered, guided, helped and taught Jesus now comforts, counsels, directs, empowers, guides, helps and teaches us. *Jesus replied, “All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.”*^{Jn.14:23-26} So we can now pray with as much confidence as Jesus did – if we pray to God as our Father in heaven,^{Matt.6:9} because Jesus’ Father is now our Father! *You parents— if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.*^{Matt.7:9-11} *Little flock, do not be afraid. Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*^{Lk.12:32}

If we ask God for eternal life, we can be absolutely sure that He hears us and will grant our request: *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*^{1Jn.5:13-15} And once we are sure that we have eternal life, we can trust God to look after our natural life. Worry and anxiety are votes of no-confidence in God - symptoms of our unbelief! So our prayer requests should be simple expressions of our trust in God: *And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: Our Father in heaven...*^{Matt.6:5-9}

Faith actually means to trust God enough to act on His Word. When we believe God, He counts us as Righteous and forgive our sins. *For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.*^{Rom.4:3-5} So **one Believer’s single prayer** is powerful and effective: *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*^{Jas.5:16} This truth is so basic to Christianity and yet so misunderstood. People are still trying to impress God with long prayers, or loud prayers, or liturgical prayers but God only wants trusting prayers, like that of a child speaking to their parent! *At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: “O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!”*^{Matt.11:25-26}

So let’s keep our prayers uncomplicated and an expression of our confidence in God: *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*^{Eph.3:12}

**Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear**

To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sunday 24th January 2016. Ps.63. Jn.11

What fragrance is your perfume?

Olfaction is the sense of smell. A rose, a fresh cup of coffee, a wood fire. These are only three of the roughly 1 trillion (10^{12}) scents that the human nose and brain are capable of distinguishing from each other, according to a new study. For comparison, our eyes can see a few million different colours, and we can hear about 340,000 tones. Researchers had previously estimated that humans could sense only about 10,000 odours but the number had never been explicitly tested before. We detect smells by inhaling air that contains odour molecules, which then bind to receptors inside the nose, relaying messages to the brain. Most scents are composed of many odorants; a whiff of chocolate, for example, is made up of hundreds of different odour molecules. We humans have 396 smell genes compared to dogs with 811 and African Elephants with 1948 smell genes.

Yet with all our incredible ability of olfaction, few people ever appreciate the “*aroma*” of Christ!

But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. ^{2Cor.2:14-15} We cannot smell Christ's “*aroma*” through our nose because it is spiritual so we have to experience it through our spirit. Most people are still in their original state of original sin so all they can “*smell*” is death. *But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume. This is a terrific responsibility. Is anyone competent to take it on? No—but at least we don't take God's Word, water it down, and then take it to the streets to sell it cheap. We stand in Christ's presence when we speak; God looks us in the face. We get what we say straight from God and say it as honestly as we can.* ^{2Cor.2:16-17} This is because we were born in sin and thus our spirit is “*dead*” and separated from God. *Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.* ^{Eph.2:1-4}

When we are re-born from above ^{Jn.3:3} we are given a new spirit and we are united with God: *But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.* ^{Eph.2:4-6} Our fellowship (common-union) with God is personal and intimate, which means that something of God “*rubs off*” onto us. We begin to think and speak and act like Jesus: *The leaders saw how bold Peter and John were. They also realized that Peter and John were ordinary men with no training. This surprised the leaders. They realized that these men had been with Jesus.* ^{Acts.4:13}

Jesus was the most joyful Person to have ever lived so He must have been wonderful to have been with: *You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore, God, your God, has set you*

above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.^{Ps.45:7-8} So when we fellowship with Jesus we also begin to “smell” like Jesus because the Holy Spirit (who, together with God the Father and God the Son, make up the Triune Godhead) resides within us. **Jesus’ character and personality within us begins to be noticed by others.** We call this “*sanctification*” or spiritual maturity. Some people loathe being near Jesus and some like being near Jesus: *To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume.*^{2Cor.2:16} Most people though, really like the *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*^{Gal.5:22-23} of Jesus within us, because it gives them a sense of peace and security, but eventually they have to decide live or leave! This is because the Holy Spirit’s ministry (role or purpose) is to convict, convince and compel. *Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*^{Jn.16:7-11}

We need to trust the Holy Spirit to do the persuading whilst we do the perfuming!

When Mary poured the perfume on Jesus it filled the whole house: *Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*^{Jn.12:3} The perfume we use is the Name of Jesus: *Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out.*^{SolS.1:3} In fact Jesus’ name is better than any perfume because He saves us from our sin^{Matt.1:21} by His death: *A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.*^{Ecc.7:1} Let’s make sure that we keep the precious perfume of Jesus’ name pure and not spoil it by foolishness: *As dead flies cause even a bottle of perfume to stink, so a little foolishness spoils great wisdom and honour.*^{Ecc.10:1}

Bringing dishonour to Jesus will taint the aroma of Christ - our testimony. We bring dishonour to Jesus when we don’t live by faith or live by the rules of faith – God’s standards: *Some have refused to let their faith guide their conscience and their faith has been destroyed like a wrecked ship. Among these people are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan in order to teach them not to dishonour God.*^{1Tim.1:19-20} *False prophets were among God’s people in the past, as false teachers will be among you. They will secretly bring in their own destructive teachings. They will deny the Lord, who has bought them, and they will bring themselves swift destruction. Many people will follow them in their sexual freedom and will cause others to dishonour the way of truth. In their greed they will use good-sounding arguments to exploit you. The verdict against them from long ago is still in force, and their destruction is not asleep... This is especially true of those who follow their corrupt nature along the path of impure desires and who despise the Lord’s authority.*^{2Pet.2:1-10} He said to all of them, *“Those who want to come with me must say no to the things they want, pick up their crosses every day, and follow me. Those who want to save their lives will lose them. But those who lose their lives for me will save them. What good does it do for people to win the whole world but lose their lives by destroying them? If people are ashamed of me and what I say, the Son of Man will be ashamed of those people when he comes in the glory that he shares with the Father and the holy angels.*^{Lk.9:23-26}

So let’s spread the perfume of Jesus’ name far and wide – in fact to all the world!^{Mk.16:15} *While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance.*^{SolS.1:12} **This will make lots of people happy – including God:** *Perfume and incense bring joy to your heart. And a friend is sweeter when he gives you honest advice.*^{Pron.27:9} *I will accept you as fragrant incense when I bring you out from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will be proved holy through you in the sight of the nations.*^{Ez.20:41}

Sunday 31st January 2016. Ps.8. Jn.12

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth!^{Ps.8:7}

The Bible is a wonderful Book – it is a Book full of wonders! Although there are some minor discrepancies in the numbers of people and animals recorded in the OT (which are most probably copyist errors as there have been no original manuscripts in existence for thousands of years), there is no conflict in any orthodox doctrine within the Bible and there is no historical error in the Bible either. But the Bible is not a science handbook nor an historical manuscript – it is the Divine record of God’s plan of Salvation for mankind through Jesus Christ His Son. *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*^{Rom.15:4} The Bible shows how we can glorify God, have peace with Him and enjoy His goodwill. *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*^{Lk.2:14}

The Bible refers to itself as the “*Scriptures*” (from the Latin *scriptura* meaning “*writing*” see also “*scribe*”) and also the “*Word of God*”: *Jesus told them, ‘Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites in Scripture: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is pointless, because their teachings are rules made by humans.’ ‘You abandon the commandments of God to follow human traditions.’ He added, ‘You have no trouble rejecting the commandments of God in order to keep your own traditions! Because of your traditions you have destroyed the authority of God’s word. And you do many other things like that.*”^{Mk.7:6-13}

Jesus is also called the “*Word*” and “*Word of God*”. The Greek word for “*Word*” is *logos* meaning “*to reason*” or “*a reasoned discourse*” and is linked to “*logi*”. Jesus not only speaks for God but He is the visible and tangible expression of God (because He is God) *In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was already with God in the beginning. Everything came into existence through him. Not one thing that exists was made without him. He was the source of life, and that life was the light for humanity. The light shines in the dark, and the dark has never extinguished it.*^{Jn.1:1-5} Jesus not only created the world but He sustains it too. *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*^{Heb.1:1-3}

When we consider the complexity and intricacy of the universe – from the enormous solar systems and planets down to the miniscule atoms of every substance and the genes of every living creature, there is no way they could exist “*by chance*”. Their design is so complex that the only feasible explanation of their origin and their sustained existence is that a great Designer – greater than any man or machine – designed, created and sustains everything. Any other explanation is the extreme of stupidity, but unfortunately the world is full of people who are just that – stupid! Although they may use clever words and complex theories, their basic premise is that there is no God and so they are fools: *Only fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good! The LORD looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God. But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one!*^{Ps.14:1-3} Paul warns us of their stupidity and resistance to God: *Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that’s not the way of Christ. Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don’t need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.*^{Col.2:8-10}

When people continue to oppose God (who through His Creation, can clearly be seen as Creator), there are consequences. In our country, there are consequences of opposing the law – people who are convicted of murder are imprisoned (in other countries they are executed); theft results in a fine or imprisonment, etc. So it is reasonable to expect that there are consequences of breaking God's laws. *God shows his anger from heaven. It is against all the godless and evil things people do. They are so evil that they say no to the truth. The truth about God is plain to them. God has made it plain. Ever since the world was created it has been possible to see the qualities of God that are not seen. I'm talking about his eternal power and about the fact that he is God. Those things can be seen in what he has made. So people have no excuse for what they do. They knew God. But they didn't honour him as God. They didn't thank him. Their thinking became worthless. Their foolish hearts became dark. They claimed to be wise. But they made fools of themselves. They would rather have statues of gods than the glorious God who lives forever. Their statues of gods are made to look like people, birds, animals and reptiles. So God let them go. He allowed them to do what their sinful hearts wanted to. He let them commit sexual sins. They polluted one another's bodies by what they did. They chose a lie instead of God's truth. They worshiped and served created things. They didn't worship the Creator. But he must be praised forever. Amen.*^{Rom.1:18-25}

No one has ever managed to perfectly live by God's standard, (except Jesus) which is why we need Someone to pay the penalties occurred from the failure to keep God's rules. The Bible explains how Jesus has paid the penalty for our failures. Sometimes it is explained by illustration or by instruction; sometimes it is explained by parable or by poetry; sometimes it is explained by memoir or by memo – but by whatever method, the message is the same: *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*^{Jn.20:31} Most of the people living at the time when the Bible was written were not aware of their significance. *At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.*^{Jn.12:16} But some were aware of their significance and spoke clearly about Jesus: *Isaiah said this because he had seen Jesus' glory and had spoken about him.*^{Jn.12:41} *Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad.*^{Jn.8:56} *But David was a prophet. He knew that God had made a promise to him. He had taken an oath that someone in David's family line would be king after him. David saw what was ahead. So he spoke about the Christ rising from the dead. He said that the Christ would not be left in the grave. His body wouldn't rot in the ground. God has raised this same Jesus back to life. We are all witnesses of this. Jesus has been given a place of honour at the right hand of God. He has received the Holy Spirit from the Father. This is what God had promised. It is Jesus who has poured out what you now see and hear. David did not go up to heaven. But he said, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand. I will put your enemies under your control."*^{Acts.2:30-35}

But however wonderful the Bible is, and however much we know about the Bible, unless the written Word becomes the Living Word it is only print on a page of paper. *The Father who sent me has himself given witness about me. You have never heard his voice. You have never seen what he really looks like. And his word does not live in you. This is because you do not believe the One he sent. You study the Scriptures carefully. You study them because you think they will give you eternal life. The Scriptures you study give witness about me. But you refuse to come to me and receive life.*^{Jn.5:37-40}

The value of Scripture is when we put it into practice by believing and acting on it – and it really works! *The word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.*^{1Thes.2:13}

Let's continue to wonder at the Living Word as well as the Written Word.

**Remember, our *Altitude* determines our *Attitude*!
(Our *worship* determines who we are and what we do.)**

February:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being. Rev.4:11

Sunday 7th February 2016. Ps.64 Family Service followed by shared lunch

Communicating the Gospel

The Bible shows how we can glorify God, have peace with Him and enjoy His goodwill. The angels communicated this message to the shepherds: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men*^{Lk.2:14} and now it is our work to communicate this message to the world! The Great Commission from Jesus is our Go-Mission – our Mission to GO into all the world: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*^{Matt.28:18-20} Not every Christian is expected or equipped to preach publicly but every Christian is expected and equipped to testify publicly: *I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.*^{Phile.1:6} And there are as many ways of testifying to God's great plan of salvation as there are people who have experienced it - but if we are not understood, we have not communicated!

There may be several reasons why we fail to communicate. Sometimes people are spiritually deaf, or sometimes we are too complicated and we don't present the message clearly or simply enough *Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.*^{2Cor.3:12-14} But whatever the reason that people don't understand, there is always hope that one day – maybe today – they will turn to God and be made whole - spirit, soul and body. *May the God who gives peace make you holy in every way. May he keep your whole being—spirit, soul, and body—blameless when our Lord Jesus Christ comes.*^{1Thes.5:23}

People are deaf to the Gospel because the Gospel is spiritual and people can only understand spiritual matters with the help of the Holy Spirit: *They see, but they're blind. They hear, but they don't listen. They don't even try to understand. So they make Isaiah's prophecy come true: 'You will hear clearly but never understand. You will see clearly but never comprehend. These people have become close-minded and hard of hearing. They have shut their eyes so that their eyes never see. Their ears never hear. Their minds never understand. And they never return to me for healing! Blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear.'*^{Matt.13:13-16} *Some people don't have the Holy Spirit. They don't accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. Things like that are foolish to them. They can't understand them. In fact, such things can't be understood without the Spirit's help.*^{1Cor.2:14} We can (and must) keep on praying that God will open their spiritual eyes and ears so they can believe: *Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand. But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*^{2Cor.3:14-18}

But we must also keep proclaiming the timeless message of Jesus and how He has paid the penalty for our failures (sins): *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*^{Jn.20:31} If we don't proclaim Jesus as the only Saviour from our sins, we present a false message and a false hope – and that is no hope! *But how can people call for help if they don't know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven't heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? And how is anyone going*

to tell them, unless someone is sent to do it? That's why Scripture exclaims: *A sight to take your breath away! Grand processions of people telling all the good things of God! But not everybody is ready for this, ready to see and hear and act. Isaiah asked what we all ask at one time or another: "Does anyone care, God? Is anyone listening and believing a word of it?" The point is, before you trust, you have to listen. But unless Christ's Word is preached, there's nothing to listen to. But I ask, "Didn't they hear that message?" Certainly they did! "The voice of the messengers has gone out into the whole world and their words to the ends of the earth." Again I ask, "Didn't Israel understand that message?" Moses was the first to say, "I will make you jealous of people who are not a nation. I will make you angry about a nation that doesn't understand." Isaiah said very boldly, "I was found by those who weren't looking for me. I was revealed to those who weren't asking for me."*^{Rom.10:14-20}

Sometimes we don't present our message clearly or simply enough. That is why the Church MUST encourage and equip Christians to communicate the Good News of God's peace on earth and God's goodwill toward men.^{Lk.2:14} Like every social grouping, Christians have their own clichés and phrases that are often misunderstood (and sometimes not understood) by outsiders. The Bible (and also our hymnal) uses lots of similes and metaphors that often "roll off our tongue" but make little sense to anyone who is not Bible literate, such as "Blood of the Lamb" "Mt. Zion" "living sacrifice" etc. The answer is not to stop using these phrases but to explain their meaning so people can understand. **We must communicate clearly:** *Musical instruments like the flute or harp produce sounds. If there is no difference in the notes, how can a person tell what tune is being played? For example, if the trumpet doesn't sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? In the same way, if you don't speak in a way that can be understood, how will anyone know what you're saying? You will be talking into thin air.*^{1Cor.14:7-9}

Sometimes we make the Gospel so complicated but the gospel is simple: *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*^{Mk.10:14-16}

Although there are wonderful stories in the Bible there are some weird superstitions that have crept into Church traditions - including Pentecostal Churches – that have no Biblical basis. **Never read a Bible verse – read the whole paragraph!** Then at least the verse can be seen in context. Unlike the Radio show "Just a Minute" where the participants talk for one minute without deviation or repetition (even though their talk maybe completely nonsensical) communicating the Gospel may involve some repetition because there is only one Bible message: *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*^{Rom.15:4}

But we should never deviate from the theme of Jesus paying the penalty for our sins and what we say must make sense. *Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.*^{Col.4:3-4}

Unfortunately, some people don't hear the Gospel because the messenger's words are drowned out by their actions – actions really do speak louder than words! *Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. [Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul.] Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*^{1Pet.2:11-12} *Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.*^{Col.4:5-6}

Let's commit ourselves to trusting God and obeying His will at any cost. God's first demand on us is to believe Him, i.e. to **trust Him enough to act on His Word.** *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."*^{Jn.4:34} *Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*^{Jn.6:29} This trust is simple yet profound and

transforms us from sinner to saint. It is the best way to live and the blest way to live; so let's trust and obey for there's no other way! *But godliness with contentment is great gain.*^{1Tim.6:6}

Sunday 14th February 2016. Ps.66:1-12 Jn.13

Such Love! *Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*^{Jn.13:1} The greatest and highest achievement any one can attain is to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.^{Mat.22:37-38} And yet there is something even greater and higher than our love for God – **God's love for us:** *This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the payment for our sins... We love because he first loved us.*^{1Jn.4:10/19} And God loved us when we were unlovely – still in our sins and His enemies: *But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*^{Rom.5:8} This is genuine altruistic, love. God not only "lavished" this love on us^{1Jn.3:1} but He also wants us to emulate that love. Love one another. *You must love one another, just as I have loved you. If you love one another, everyone will know you are my disciples.*^{Jn.13:34-35} With such love we never need stay lonely or continue to feel helpless because *God sets the lonely in families.*^{Ps.68:6}

This family that God sets us into is not the same as the family of humanity. We were all born into the family of humanity - the human race - because we have all been created by God and descend from the same ancestor, Adam: *Here is the written story of Adam's family line. When God created man, he made him in his own likeness. He created them as male and female. He blessed them. And he called them "man" when they were created.*^{Gen.5:1-2} But just being born – even being born into a religious or Christian family, doesn't make us part of God's family. *"I know you are Abraham's children. But you are ready to kill me. You have no room for my word. I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. You do what you have heard from your father." "Abraham is our father," they answered. Jesus said, "Are you really Abraham's children? If you are, you will do the things Abraham did. But you have decided to kill me. I am a man who has told you the truth I heard from God. Abraham didn't do the things you want to do. You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not children of people who weren't married to each other," they objected. "The only Father we have is God himself. Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me. I came from God, and now I am here. I have not come on my own. He sent me. "Why aren't my words clear to you? Because you can't really hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil. You want to obey your father's wishes."*^{Jn.8:37-44}

The **Family of Believers** is distinct from the family of humanity: *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*^{Gal.6:10} And we must be born again (from above)^{Jn.3:3} to be part of this family: *When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.*^{Rom.5:12} *Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.*^{1Cor.15:22} **Believers** (including those who are already in heaven) **have a permanent place in this Family.** *Jesus replied, "What I'm about to tell you is true. Everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave has no lasting place in the family. But a son belongs to the family forever. So if the Son of Man sets you free, you will really be free."*^{Jn.8:34-36} *I bow in prayer to the Father because of my work among you. From the Father his whole family in heaven and on earth gets its name.*^{Eph.3:14-15} Jesus is not ashamed of His family and neither must we be ashamed of Him or His family: *God has made everything. He has acted in exactly the right way. He is bringing his many sons and daughters to share in his glory. To do so, he has made the One who saved them perfect because of his sufferings. The One who makes people holy and the people he makes holy belong to the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. He says, "I will announce your name to my brothers and sisters. I will sing your praises among those who worship you." Again he says, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here I am. Here are the children God has given me."*^{1Jeh.2:10-13} *If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels.*^{Lk.9:26}

Now we are part of this Family - God's family, the family of Believers - we must honour the Father and keep to His rules: *Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order. It is God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules. Treat everyone you meet with dignity. Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government.*^{1Pet.2:13-17} And the greatest rule of this family is **LOVE**. There are several words for love in the Greek language but God's love includes all of them in the purest and highest form, without any flaws or imperfections. One sort of love is *agape* and is sometimes translated *beloved* because it is an unconditional love. *Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't jealous. It doesn't sing its own praises. It isn't arrogant. It isn't rude. It doesn't think about itself. It isn't irritable. It doesn't keep track of wrongs. It isn't happy when injustice is done, but it is happy with the truth. Love never stops being patient, never stops believing, never stops hoping, never gives up. Love never comes to an end... So these three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the best one of these is love.*^{1Cor.13:4-13} There is another word for love – *philo* – which is a friendship love often called brotherly love and God loves with this love too: *No, the Father himself loves (philo) you because you have loved (philo) me and have believed that I came from God.*^{Jn.16:27} But whatever word we use for love, we must love like God loves - with a deep and inclusive love: *Most important of all, continue to show **deep love** for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.*^{1Pet.4:8} *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the **love you have for all** God's people — the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.*^{Col.1:3-6}

We should never underestimate the value of God's love and the privilege of being God's family – because that's who we are now. *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*^{1Jn.3:1} Being loved by God and included in His family means that **we pray to God as our Father** and not just to God as a Deity: *This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, let your name be kept holy.*^{Matt.6:19} As Father, God is **Head of His Household**. *My Father's household has many abodes (dwelling places); if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?*^{2Jn.14:2} And as **Head of the Household**, God is our **Provider**: *So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide (Jehovah Jireh). And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*^{Gen.22:14} *Tell those who have the riches of this world not to be arrogant and not to place their confidence in anything as uncertain as riches. Instead, they should place their confidence in God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. Tell them to do good, to do a lot of good things, to be generous, and to share. By doing this they store up a treasure for themselves which is a good foundation for the future. In this way they take hold of what life really is.*^{1Tim.6:17-19} And as **Head of the Household**, God is also our **Protector**: *The LORD your God moves around in your camp to protect you and hand your enemies over to you. So your camp must always be holy. This way, the LORD will never see anything offensive among you and turn away from you.*^{Deut.23:14} *But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.*^{2Thess.3:3}

Because we know that we are loved by God and are His children, we can be sure that in every situation we will ever face we will always have the support and comfort we need. Then as God comforts us, we can comfort others. *Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He is the Father who gives tender love. All comfort comes from him. He comforts us in all our troubles. Now we can comfort others when they are in trouble.*^{2Cor.1:3-4} **Such love!** *I'm now requesting that we continue to love each other. It's not as though I'm writing to give you a new commandment. Rather, from the beginning we were commanded to love each other. Love means that we live by doing what he commands. We were commanded to live in love, and you have heard this from the beginning.*^{2Jn.1:5-6} *Dear friends, use your most holy faith to grow. Pray with the Holy Spirit's help. Remain in God's love as you look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you eternal life.*^{Jude20-21}

Sunday 21st February 2016. Ps.66:1-21 Jn.13:21-36

Good intention or godly inspiration? Both are needed to but we still have to actually live the Christian life. *I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me.*^{Gal.2:20}

In Roman times, crucifixion was the normal way of executing criminals. It was an extremely painful and agonising death that lasted many hours. Jesus hung on the cross for 6 hours and the Romans were surprised that he had died so quickly.^{Jn.19:31-37}

Last week we saw how wonderful God's love to us is – *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*^{Jn.3:1} When Peter realised the greatness of God's love, he said that he would do anything for Jesus: *I will lay down my life for you.*^{Jn.13:37} But knowing all things, Jesus cautioned Peter: *Will you really give your life for me? What I'm about to tell you is true. Before the cockerel crows, you will say three times that you don't know me!*^{Jn.13:38} The proverb "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" means that good intentions aren't enough – we must actually act not just intend to act. **People with good intentions make promises but people with good character keep them!** Just a few hours after Peter said that he would lay down his life for Jesus, Jesus had to remind him about good intentions: *Simon are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*^{Mk.14:37-38} And a little while after that, Peter then denounced Jesus three times: *As he went to the entrance, another servant saw Peter. She told those who were there, "This man was with Jesus from Nazareth." Again Peter denied it and swore with an oath, "I don't know the man!" After a little while the men standing there approached Peter and said, "It's obvious you're also one of them. Your accent gives you away!" Then Peter began to curse and swear with an oath, "I don't know the man!" Just then a rooster crowed. Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before a rooster crows, you will say three times that you don't know me." Then Peter went outside and cried bitterly.*^{Matt.26:71-75} As we know, Peter was restored and went on to preach boldly and fearlessly about the love of God in Jesus until eventually he took up his physical cross – literally - to follow Jesus when Peter was crucified just as Jesus had foretold.^{Jn.21:18-19}

It was God's love that motivated Peter to stay faithful and it is **God's love that motivates us:** *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*^{2Cor.5:14-15} God did not wait until we were good enough before He loved us – it was when we were not good enough that God loved us. *Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn't been so weak, we wouldn't have known what to do anyway. We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.*^{Rom.5:6-8} Many times in the OT God explains how He found Israel, loved her and cleaned her but she turned her back on God, despising His love.^{Ez.16;Is.5 etc.} Today we have the whole of Scriptures and the Holy Spirit available to us, so we don't make the same mistakes as they did - those examples are for us to learn from!^{Rom.15:4;1Cor.10:6;Heb.3-4}

To help someone else at our own inconvenience in **admirable**. To help someone else at our own expense is **altruistic**. But to help some else at the cost of our life is **absolute** - the ultimate sacrifice. *The greatest love you can show is to give your life for your friends. You are my friends if you obey my commandments. I don't call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. But I've called you friends because I've made known to you everything that I've heard from my Father. You didn't choose me, but I chose you. I have appointed you to go, to produce fruit that will last, and to ask the Father in my name to give you whatever you ask for. Love each other. This*

is what I'm commanding you to do.^{Jn.15:13-17} **Jesus saved us, cleansed us and restored us by laying His life down for us:** *I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*^{Jn.10:14-18} Jesus gave His life for us because there was none other good enough to pay the price of sin. But He also gave His life for us as an example for us to follow. *We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him. And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, **and** love one another, just as he commanded us. Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.*^{1Jn.3:16-24}

Few of us are ever called to show our ultimate love by giving our physical life for others, **but we are all called to show our ultimate love for Jesus by taking up our cross and following Him.** *If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.*^{Matt.10:37-39} Then Jesus said to his disciples, *“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds. And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.”*^{Matt.16:24-28} This ultimate love for God is actually a very good deal because we exchange our bad life for God's best life, our problems for God's promises. Another translation puts it this way: *Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for? Don't be in such a hurry to go into business for yourself. Before you know it the Son of Man will arrive with all the splendour of his Father, accompanied by an army of angels. You'll get everything you have coming to you, a personal gift. This isn't pie in the sky by and by.* **We are to follow Jesus' precepts not our preferences. When we belong to God we are required to follow Jesus – both His instructions and His example – rather than following our own will.** This is not difficult if we stay in fellowship (partnership) with God through worship, prayer and Bible study and stay in fellowship with God's people: *As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died.*^{Gal.6:14}

Let's continue to remember this wonderful truth: *My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*^{Gal.2:20} **And then let us actually live this truth rather than just intend to live it!**

Sunday 28th February 2016. Ps.100. Jn.14

Do you live in a house or a home?

The difference between a house and home is personalisation. A house is a place that you **could live in** but a home is the place that you **do live in** – it is where you belong and you have put your mark on. Your home is **yours** and so you are no longer a guest but you can do whatever you want (within reason or within your house-rules).

God is Omnipresent. God is in heaven and so there should be a real sense of awe when we come to Him: *Watch your step when you go to the house of God. It is better to go there and listen than to bring the sacrifices fools bring. Fools are unaware that they are doing something evil. Don't be in a hurry to talk. Don't be eager to speak in the presence of God. Since God is in heaven and you are on earth, limit the number of your words.*^{Ecc.5:1-2} But because He is Omnipresent, God is also on earth too – in fact God is everywhere: *How can I get away from your Spirit? Where can I go to escape from you? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I lie down in the deepest parts of the earth, you are also there. Suppose I were to rise with the sun in the east and then cross over to the west where it sinks into the ocean.*^{Ps.139:7-9} And because God is omnipresent, **He doesn't live in a man-made house** like a Church or a Temple. *But the Most High God does not live in houses made by human hands. As God says through the prophet, 'Heaven is my throne. The earth is under my control. What kind of house will you build for me?' says the Lord. Where will my resting place be? Didn't my hand make all these things?*^{2Aas.7:48-50} **But God does live in a God-made house - people!** *For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*^{2Cor.6:16} *Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*^{Rev.21:3}

God wants to change us from being a House into being a Home. Although we are God's house, He wants us to be **His home**: *Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him. We will come to him and make our home with him."*^{Jn.14:23} The Roman officer trusted Jesus to heal his servant, but had not understood that Jesus wants to be with us: *Lord, don't trouble yourself by coming to my home, for I am not worthy of such an honour. I am not even worthy to come and meet you. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed.*^{Lk.7:6-7} He still considered Jesus to be so holy that He couldn't possibly be a Friend to him. But God is both high and nigh: *The high and lofty one who lives in eternity, the Holy One, says this: "I live in the high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble."*^{Is.57:15} *The Son of Man... is a friend of sinners!*^{Lk.7:34} **We belong to God:** *I want you to realize that the LORD is God. He made us, and we belong to him. We are his people. We are the sheep belonging to his flock.*^{Ps.100:3} and **Jesus wants to come to us and stay with us:** *When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy... Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."*^{Lk.19:5-10}

A home needs doors and windows. When a house is built there must be a door - a way in and a way out. Our mind is the door **into our heart** and our mouth is the door **out of our heart**. We need to make them secure to prevent burglaries! *Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*^{Eph.4:21-24} **LORD, guard my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips. Don't let my heart be drawn to what is evil. Don't let me join men who do evil. They don't do what is right.**^{Ps.141:3-4} *Job replied to the LORD, "I'm not worthy. How can I reply to you? I'm putting my hand over my mouth. I'll stop talking. I spoke once. But I really don't have any answer. I spoke twice. But I won't say anything else."*^{Job.40:3-5} We also need windows to let the light in! Our eyes are our windows – we need to be careful what we watch. *Your eye is a lamp that provides*

light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. But when it is bad, your body is filled with darkness. Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness. If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a floodlight were filling you with light.^{Luke 11:34-36} God's Word is a lamp and we must let that light into our hearts: *Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.*^{Ps.119:105}

A home needs trinkets: Our personal touch changes a house into a home. Homes are decorated with personal photos, pictures, awards, mementos, etc. **What mementos do you have of your time with God? How do you remember those experiences?** In the OT the people made memorial offerings^{Lev.2} and built memorials^{Josh.4:7} to remember God's faithfulness. **We need memorials to God's faithfulness** – to remember what God has done and how He helped us. It is a good practice to write them down so they remain fresh and factual, because our memories fade as we get older. Testimonies are personal and they change our spiritual house into a spiritual home. Other memorials are our **prayers and gifts** to God: *The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."*^{Acts.10:4} We should enjoy these decorations in our house by appreciating God's faithfulness and the best way to do this is to **meditate on God's promises:** *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long (I reverently ponder it all the day long). Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.*^{Ps.119:97-100} *You have been raised up with Christ. So think about things that are in heaven. That is where Christ is. He is sitting at God's right hand. Think about things that are in heaven. Don't think about things that are on earth. You died. Now your life is hidden with Christ in God. Christ is your life. When he appears again, you also will appear with him in heaven's glory.*^{Col.3:1-4}

Our physical home can be owned, leased or rented. Our spiritual home is "rented" from our "Landlord" God. We were saved by *believing God raised Jesus from the dead and confessing Jesus is Lord.*^{Rom.10:9-10} This means that Jesus is now in charge of our life, not us. Our house (our life) is no longer ours but God's and we are His "tenants". God has rules that we must abide by and He expects us to look after His property. *Don't become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That's not partnership; that's war. Is light best friends with dark? Does Christ go strolling with the Devil? Do trust and mistrust hold hands? Who would think of setting up pagan idols in God's holy Temple? But that is exactly what we are, each of us a temple in whom God lives. God himself put it this way: "I'll live in them, move into them; I'll be their God and they'll be my people. So leave the corruption and compromise; leave it for good," says God. "Don't link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for myself. I'll be a Father to you; you'll be sons and daughters to me."*^{2Cor.6:14-18} *The Word of the Master, God.*

So let's remember that we live in a home not a house and we live with God who wants to share every part of our life with Him. *For we don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. If we live, it's to honour the Lord. And if we die, it's to honour the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. Christ died and rose again for this very purpose—to be Lord both of the living and of the dead.*^{Rom.14:7-9} *Brothers and sisters, imitate me, and pay attention to those who live by the example we have given you. I have often told you, and now tell you with tears in my eyes, that many live as the enemies of the cross of Christ. In the end they will be destroyed. Their own emotions are their god, and they take pride in the shameful things they do. Their minds are set on worldly things. We, however, are citizens of heaven. We look forward to the Lord Jesus Christ coming from heaven as our Saviour. Through his power to bring everything under his authority, he will change our humble bodies and make them like his glorified body.*^{Phil.3:17-21}

March:

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise! Rev.5:12

Sunday 6th March 2016. Ps.67.

God's prescription for good health, full life and true prosperity.

When we are sick we usually go to the Doctor to get a prescription for some medicine. But it is much better to avoid getting sick if at all possible and often the Doctor will advise us about a better lifestyle and a better diet to prevent sickness. **God has revealed Himself as our Doctor** (or Healer) and heals people both spiritually and physically. *For I am the LORD who heals you.* ^{Ex.15:26} *He sent forth his word and healed them.* ^{Ps.107:20} *Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.* ^{Acts 10:38} God's prescription for good health is: **do what God says.** *My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.* ^{Prov.4:20-23} However, God does not guarantee perfect physical health for us and the Bible records many examples of good people as well as godly people becoming sick and even dying through no fault of their own. People like Peter's mother-in-law, ^{Lk.4:38} Lazarus, ^{Jn.11} Jairus' daughter, ^{Lk.8} Paul, ^{2Cor.11-12} Timothy, ^{1Tim.5:23} Trophimus, ^{2Tim.4:20} etc. However, if we ignore God's advice and don't take His "prescriptions," we can expect to get spiritually and physically sick and there are also examples of people who were sick through their own fault: *For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honouring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.* ^{1Cor.11:29-30} But God's blessings are available to all of us whatever condition we are in – whether in poor health or good health. However, if we ignore God's advice and His "**prescription**" we can expect to bear more stress, pain and discomfort than we need to. *Take to heart all the words of warning I have given you today. Pass them on as a command to your children so they will obey every word of these instructions. These instructions are not empty words—they are your life! By obeying them you will enjoy a long life in the land you will occupy when you cross the Jordan River.* ^{Dent.32:46-47} *Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.* ^{Ps.1:1-3}

Each week we boldly proclaim that **good health, full life and true prosperity is our inheritance in Jesus and the reward of the righteous,** ^{Ps.1:1-3 Prov.13:21 Jn.10:10;3Jn.2} but we do not teach or experience total perfect health at all times, and neither are we millionaires! **However, what we do teach and experience is God's constant company, comfort and ever-present help.** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.* ^{2Cor.1:3-4} *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.* ^{Ps.46:1} We believe that God gives us the *ability to produce wealth,* ^{Dent.8:18} and that His blessings brings [true] wealth without any trouble. ^{Prov.10:22} *Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.* ^{Lk.12:15} *True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth.* ^{1Tim.6:6} We believe that God means what He says and that **His Word works for Believers:** *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.* ^{1Thess.2:13}

The Christian life is neither pain-free nor problem-free but it is a freely blessed life. **The Christian life can be stress-free** (*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by*

prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.^{Phil.4:6}), **regret-free** (And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.^{Rom.8:28}) and **debt-free** (Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.^{Rom.13:8}) because **God has forgiven us ALL our sins. BUT these qualities are not automatic** – they are the result of consistent and persistent adherence to God’s advice and “prescription”. Although God has given us everything we need, we still have to add to our faith, otherwise we live like slaves and not sons.^{Gal.4:1-7} His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is near-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.^{2Pet.1:3-11}

So how do we add these qualities to our faith? We add these qualities to our faith by sensible, structured and sensitive prayers that are Spirit-led: But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, staying right at the centre of God’s love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life!^{Jude1:20-21}

Imagine you and a friend had coffee every morning just to connect and chat. Sounds good, but what if you and your friend sat and said the same things every day. Each new morning was a tired repetition of the day before -and almost word for word. Bizarre, right? Well, sometimes our prayers are just that way. We say the same things about the same things – and do so on a daily basis!

Here’s the solution: Use the Bible to guide and inspire our talks with God. It’s a big book and there are lots of passages we can use to add variety, meaning, and richness to our prayer life. We do this in three ways:

1) **Pray the prayers of Scripture.** Paul’s prayer for the Colossian Believers,^{Col.1:9-12} is a great one to use for our family.

2) **Pray the content of Scripture.** Pray through a passage, reading it slowly, and talking to God about its meaning. The Psalms are great for this and there’s one for almost every life circumstance.

3) **Pray your thoughts as you read Scripture.** For example, when reading Psalm 23, we might think of others who need special shepherding from the Lord or restoration for their souls. Donald Whitney champions this method in his book, *Praying the Bible*.

We can defeat monotony by letting Scripture guide our conversation with God. The Psalms were written as songs to sing back to God and **every Psalm has a sigh for the soul!** Although **ALL** Scripture is *God-breathed and useful*,^{2Tim.3:16} the OT was written before Jesus was born and died, and before He rose from the dead and ascended to the Father’s right-hand from where He sent the Holy Spirit. But we are **NT Believers** who have been forgiven **ALL** of our sins and have the Holy Spirit **permanently** residing within us.

Good health, full life and true prosperity is our inheritance in Jesus. It is our birth-right and what God expects from us, so let’s continue to keep taking **God’s advice**, keep taking the “**medicine**” that God prescribes and keep **adding to our faith** as we pray in the Holy Spirit.

Sunday 13th March 2016 Ps.148 (Cheriton Pentecostal Church)

Praise and Worship

Many Churches advertise their Sunday morning services as **“WORSHIP.”** They call the whole service “*worship*” but the truth is that often they do everything but worship in the “*worship*” service. Relatively few hearts are sincerely lifted up in worship during those services. **We were created with a purpose - to worship God:** *Worship the Lord your God. He is the only one you should serve*^{Lk.4:8} and **God is looking for worshipers.**^{Jn.4:19-26} Our English word “*worship*” is derived from the Old English word “*weorþscipe*”, meaning worthiness or worth-ship. So we worship God when we honour Him **but** this has to be a genuine reflection of our heart – our actions & attitudes and our lives & lips. The words *work*^{Gen.2:15} and *worship*^{Ex.23:25} are actually the same word in Hebrew showing that worship is linked to what we do – our daily work. Abel’s offering was accepted because he gave his offering as an act of worship (*in faith*^{Heb.11:4}), whereas Cain gave his offering with a bad attitude and out of duty.^{Gen.4:5} When we come to God with our “offerings” – our gifts of praise, prayer, appreciation and even our money – they must be an expression of our trust and a token of His worth to us. *No one is to appear before me empty-handed.*^{Ex.23:15} *When you come together, every one of you brings something. You bring a hymn or a teaching or a word from God.*^{1Cor.14:26} **That’s why true praise is passionate!** (Giving to God is a response to His blessings and should never be an attempt to obtain His blessings. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*^{Eph.1:3} However there is a cycle of sowing and reaping: *I will respond to the skies and they will respond to the earth;*^{Hos.2:21} *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously... Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.*^{2Cor.9:6-11}

Praise: The Hebrew language has more than 37 different words or derivatives for praise and worship whereas we have about 8 words in English. One of the Greek words for praise in the NT is *eulogy* meaning *good-word* and praise is literally **saying good words about God**. Praise is very powerful and is likened to a “*sword*”: *May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands.*^{Ps.149:6} You can’t praise very long without entering into victory^{Jdg1:1-2} (*Judah means praise*). You can sometimes pray about matters, and the more you declare the problem and pray around it, the more your faith begins to waver. You see the problem first as it is. Then, it becomes even bigger than it really is. And, finally, it becomes overwhelming. But **when you praise, you always enter into victory.** **Praise is:** entering in: *Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise.*^{Psalms 100:4} telling the truth about God;^{Lk.23:47} a choice;^{Is.61 (esp.v3)} created by God;^{Is.57:18-19} a sacrifice (but not an effort because God creates it);^{Heb.13:15-16} flowing from our tongue;^{Ps.45:1-2} continual;^{Is.62:6-7} sowing to God with a guaranteed harvest;^{Hos.2:21-23; Phil.4:8-20} a celebration;^{Is.35:10;51:11} strengthening;^{Ps.8:1-2;Matt.21:14-16;Is.53:12-54:1-3} But there is an ascent^{Ps.24:1-6} in our praise to where we meet with God Himself (see *Songs of Ascent*: Ps.120-134).

Worship. Worship is the natural progression of Praise. Worship is not singing songs (although it can include singing songs) - worship is **obedience** - it is what we **do**: *We will worship and then we will come back to you.*^{Gen.22:5} *I will surely bless you... because you have obeyed me.*^{Gen.22:17-18} I see the difference between praising and worshipping as if I were part of the Palm Sunday procession. I shout with the whole crowd, “*Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.*” **That is praise.** But when Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, looks at me and says, “*I love you.*” and I reply, “*Lord, I love You,*” I’m no longer waving my palm and shouting, “*Hosanna!*” I’m bowing in worship and saying, “*My Lord and my God.*” Others are still waving their palms and shouting, “*Hosanna!*” But I’m totally

oblivious to what is happening around me. He looks at me, and all the love of eternity is poured into my soul. At this moment, I know how much He loves me. I know His majesty in a way I have never known it before. Nobody has to tell me He is King. I know it, and I worship Him, bowing before Him, recognizing His majesty, His regal position. **Worship is you shut away with God.** In the middle of the busiest street in town, in the busiest restaurant, in the midst of the greatest activity of the day, you find little moments to be alone with the Lord. Thank God there can be many moments throughout the day in which it is just you and the Lord. Even though many things are happening around you, you can close yourself in with Him.

Worship differs from praise. Anyone can praise God – even an unbeliever like the pagan soldier, ^{Lk.23:47} or even creation. ^{Ps.148} But worship is different because worship is a spirit (i.e. an attribute of the Holy Spirit) *True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. They are the kind of worshipers the Father is looking for. God is spirit. His worshipers must worship him in spirit and in truth.* ^{Jn.4:23-24} When we praise the Lord, we **choose** to say good words about God in the same way as we choose to put on a coat. ^{Is.61:3} But we must yield to the Holy Spirit to really worship. It helps to sing songs that are not very complicated. Spiritual things are easy. *If our mind has to be so involved with words, we're too busy thinking.* **We want our spirits to ascend in praise as the anointing increases.** Use a simple songs and don't worry about the beauty of the words and ideas. Don't worry about complicated thoughts. **Praise, worship and adore in simplicity so that we can be lost in worship.** Projectors and song books are a blessing for those who may not know the songs being used. **However, if we still need the help of the screen then the music is too complicated for true worship.** As we sing simpler songs, the spirit of worship will come. In marriage when we have a tender moment, the words are few and from the heart – we're not talking about the bills, etc., we're just enjoying each other's presence. **We must do the same when we worship the Lord.** In our relationship with the Lord - when we first met Him, He hadn't done anything for us that we were aware of. But we saw that He was wonderful. *"Oh, I love Him with all my heart,"* new converts are prone to say. After we're saved a while, we think about Him in a different way: *He saved me. He filled me with the Holy Ghost. He heals me when I'm sick. When I needed Him to pay my bills, He gave me money.* **But what about the Lord as a Person?** Our praise is often too verb-orientated and we forget who He is. If we fell in love with Him before we knew Him, shouldn't knowing Him bring a greater relationship of love and worship? The angels in heaven worship and they have never been redeemed. They worship because of the Person of the Lord. They worship because they know Him, not because they've been saved, healed, or filled with the Holy Ghost. I'm not minimizing praising God for what He does but God wants us to know Him, to feel His presence, to come into His presence in such a way that we will worship Him in the beauty of holiness at His holy hill.

So let's commit ourselves to a life of praise as we continually say good things about God, and also to a life of worship where our whole life is spent honouring Him in grateful obedience. *I will extol the LORD at all times, his praise will always be on my lips.* ^{Ps.34:1}

Sunday 20th March 2016. Ps.118:19-29. Matt.21.

God wants spiritual fruit not religious nuts!

The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ^{Matt.21:43}

Religious people are often criticised as *"living in another world"* and although there is nothing wrong with that, they are considered *"deluded"* and *"irrelevant"* because society has believed the lie that: *Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness.* ^{Karl Marx} That is, **UNTIL** something happens that

the physical and medical world can't help with!! Then people look for quick answers to salve their consciences rather save their souls! They want the goods without the God! Because our spirit (our God-conscience) and our soul (our self-conscience) are intertwined, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between them. But God and His Word can and does divide between the soul and spirit. *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*^{Heb.4:12-13}

Although any religion can provide illusory happiness, only true religion provides the true happiness of loving God, living for God and pleasing God: *Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.*^{1Tim.5:3-5} True religion is not just about *doing*, it is about *being* - it is about *being* God-like by being re-born from above.^{Jn.3:3} True religion is also remaining uncorrupted by this world. *If a person thinks that he is religious but can't control his tongue, he is fooling himself. That person's religion is worthless. Pure, unstained religion, according to God our Father, is to take care of orphans and widows when they suffer and to remain uncorrupted by this world.*^{Jas.1:26-27}

When Jesus "cursed" the fig-tree, He was teaching that the Jewish religion was finished. *Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.*^{Matt.21:19} After Jesus "cursed" the fig tree, He went on to "cleansed" the Temple. Jesus had already "cleansed" the Temple at the beginning of His ministry^{Jn.2} after He had turned the water into wine. Now Jesus "cleansed" the Temple again as He was completing His ministry.^{Matt.21} On both occasions Jesus was teaching that the Old Covenant with its rituals was being made obsolete^{Heb.8:13} and that the New Covenant would replace it. *So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.*^{Col.2:16-17} Although at that time the Old Covenant rituals had spiritual significance, they were temporary religious replicas of the spiritual realities of Christ that the New Covenant was about to introduce and replace. This is why the OT artefacts had to be so precisely made and kept: *We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honour beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven. There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands... If he were here on earth, he would not even be a priest, since there already are priests who offer the gifts required by the law. They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: "Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain." But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.*^{Heb.8:1-6}

When Jesus turned the water into wine at the beginning of His ministry, He showed that we are cleansed by the "wine" of the New Covenant, i.e. the blood (the life) of Jesus, not by the water of ritual washing.^{Jn.2:6} We are cleansed by drinking not by doing! *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*^{Matt.26:28} When Jesus cursed the fig tree at the end of His ministry, He showed that religion (man's attempt to cover his guilt) is finished and even the good ritualist religion that God once prescribed is now proscribed! The fig leaves with which Adam tried to cover his shame were now withered! *At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.*^{Gen.3:7} So when Jesus cursed the fig tree and its leaves withered,

He was teaching us that God has finished with human attempt to cover the shame of our sin and now we have to rely totally on His provision to make ourselves acceptable: *And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.*^{Gen.3:21} For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.^{Is.61:10} I put on righteousness as my clothing.^{Job.29:14} I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.^{Phil.3:9-10}

In both of the Temple cleansings, Jesus referred to His “Father’s House”. At the first cleansing, Jesus made reference to **His body being the true Temple.** *Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body.* After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.^{Jn.2:19-22} (The Temple was started 20BC and completed AD64) At the second cleansing, **Jesus states that His Father’s House is a House of Prayer.** *The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations’*^{Is.56:7; Je 7:11} *but you have turned it into a den of thieves.*^{Mk.11:17} **In the New Covenant our body is God’s Temple – WE are the place where God meets us and WE are the place where God dwells.** *Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.*^{1Cor.6:19-20} We no longer go on pilgrimages or use special rituals and festivals in order to meet with God. God comes to us and takes away our shame. *For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*^{2Cor.6:16} God fellowships with us – permanently! *Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will go to them and make our home with them.”*^{Jn.14:23} The sacrifices we bring to God are offerings of praise and obedience – words and works. *Through Jesus we should always bring God a sacrifice of praise, that is, words that acknowledge him.*^{Heb.13:15} *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*^{1Pet.2:5} *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship.*^{Rom.12:1}

The true religion that God wants from us (and also expects from us) is loving God and living for God. This not only pleases God but also produces fruit – fruit of character^{Gal.5:2-23} and fruit of charity:^{Jn.4:7-21} *Produce fruit that shows you have turned away from your sins. Don't think you can say to yourselves, ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you, God can raise up children for Abraham even from these stones. The axe is already lying at the roots of the trees. All the trees that don't produce good fruit will be cut down. They will be thrown into the fire.*^{Matt.3:8-10} Remember, our happiness is not illusory but real and this world needs us, especially when their lives fall apart. **We are spiritual fruit not religious nuts.**

Sunday 27th March 2016. Easter Service. Ps.24. Jn.20.

Who is it you are looking for?^{Jn.20:15}

This world seems to be on a never-ending search for anything and everything except what really matters – God! For instance, the search for life on Mars has no practical purpose but has already cost more money than most countries’ annual budget. The estimated cost to put 4 people on mars will be US\$6 billion but the cost of getting to heaven is free yet so few people take up the offer! *As the Scriptures say, No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.*^{Rom.3:10-12} Unless God draws people they don’t seek Him *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.*^{Jn.6:44} And God draws

people through the cross: *And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.*” He said this to indicate how he was going to die.^{1Jn.12:32-33} That is why we must preach the **cross of Christ**. The cross of Christ refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as His sacrificial death because without the resurrection of Jesus there is no Gospel. *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.*^{2Tim.2:8}

The understanding of Righteousness is absolutely foundational to the true Gospel and to Christian maturity. Christian righteousness can be summed up in this one verse: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} And the revelation of this righteousness comes through the cross of Christ: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*^{Rom.1:16-17} But this message is foolishness to the world. *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... While Jews clamour for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified. Jews treat this like an anti-miracle—and Greeks pass it off as absurd. But to us who are personally called by God himself—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's ultimate miracle and wisdom all wrapped up in one. Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's “weakness.”*^{1Cor.1:18-25} People always want to try to work or pay for their righteousness - like Adam and his fig-leaves, but it is only the cross of Christ that reconciles us to God: *For he [Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*^{Eph.1:14-18}

In Roman times when criminals were crucified, a “*certificate of debt*” to Caesar, was nailed to the cross as a public display of their crime. When the punishment was completed, Caesar’s court cancelled the debt with a single Greek word stamped upon the parchment: “*tetelestai*” - meaning **finished, paid in full**. Jesus who was born *King of the Jews*^{Matt.2:2} died with the “*certificate of debt*” to Caesar that stated: “*Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.*”^{1Jn.19:1-9} However, being *king of the Jews* was not the crime that Jesus paid for! Hidden to all but the Father was another certificate nailed to that cross: **sin. It was our sin that was nailed to Jesus’ cross**: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*^{Col.2:13-15} **Jesus’ crime was our sin**: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*^{1Jn.3:5} *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*^{1Is.53:5-6} *He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.*^{1Pet.2:25} Jesus had finished the work His Father had given Him to do. He knew that everything was now finished. He knew that what Scripture said must come true... After Jesus drank he said, “*It is finished.*” Then he bowed his head and died.^{1Jn.19:28-30} So when Jesus died saying “*it is finished*” (*Tetelestai*) it was not a dying gasp. **Jesus died with a cry of completion and the voice of victory because the price of our sins had been paid in full**. Yes, the cross makes peace – peace with God Himself: *For God was pleased to have all*

his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ^{Col.1:20}

So the question is: *Who is it you are looking for?* ^{Jn.20:15}

If you are looking for Jesus, you won't find Him if you are looking for a Gardener or even a Carpenter – those days are gone because Jesus is alive - **He has risen from the dead!** *He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.* ^{Matt.28:6} *You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!* ^{Mk.16:6} *He is not here; he has risen!* ^{Lk.24:6} **The Jesus we worship is glorified:** *His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.* ^{Rev.1:14-16} Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* ^{Col.3:1-4} *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* ^{Phil.2:8-11}

Although the benefits of Jesus' death are “free at the point of need”, they do cost us our life because we have to “die to self” in order to live for God. *Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.* ^{Matt.10:38-39} *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”* ^{Matt.16:24-25} Because Jesus has become our Peace and has reconciled us to God, ^{Eph.1:14-18} the comfort He gives us is for ever, not just to get us through the next day. And the happiness that Jesus gives is real not illusory (this happiness could better be explained as a **contented joy**).

The cross of Christ means we have been saved from our sins and will never have to bear the penalty for those sins. Now when we look for Jesus we don't have to look far because He has found us and come to. So let's make sure our response is like Mary's: **Rabboni!** (*Teacher*) ^{Jn.20:16} and Thomas': **My Lord and my God!** ^{Jn.20:28} because **Christ is Risen. Hallelujah!**

An Easter Poem

Wait a minute, stop right there!
What is that we spy on the chair.
A chocolate egg — brown and yummy
We lick our lips and rub our tummy!

An egg filled with air — what's that all about.
We'll share about it — leave you in no doubt,
The Easter story is sad, that is true
Let me tell of the wonder, as you sit in your pew
A man named Jesus, suffered and died
The priests and officials had schemed and lied.

His body was laid, wrapped in a bundle
The tomb door sealed — "now he'll be no trouble!"
A lady called Mary, visited and wept
When to the grave, in the morning she crept.

The grave seal is broken, the body is gone
What trick is this? What Roman con?
His body made new, He is risen
Calling her name, she stops to listen.

You see an empty egg, with air reveal
That Jesus really is "the real deal"
He promised He'd rise, no grave can contain Him
This is the joy, why Christians believe Him.

So when eating choccie eggs at Easter time
Remember this ode, remember this rhyme
This object portrays a risen King
We lift our hands and "Hallelujah" sing.

(Anne Toogood)

April:

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever! Rev.5:13

Sunday 3rd April 2016. Ps.69:30-36. Jn.21.

“I'm going fishing.” “We'll come, too,” they all said.^{Jn.21:3}

For Peter, fishing wasn't a recreation but a requisite – it was his employment. But he obviously enjoyed fishing because when he was despondent after denying Jesus three times and then watching Him die, he decided to go fishing. (The best way to cope with stress is to do something familiar that you enjoy, with friends that you trust.) And it was when Peter was fishing that Jesus came and re-commissioned him: *feed my sheep.*^{Jn.21:15-17}

Simon Peter's mission was fishing for people: *Let the nets down so you can catch some fish.* When they had done so, they caught a large number of fish... Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don't be afraid. From now on you will catch people.”^{Lk.5:4-10} We too are to fish to “catch people”: Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations.”^{Matt.28:18-19} Our “fishing” for people involves loving Jesus, caring for His sheep and following Him: “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than the other disciples do?” Peter answered him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus told him, “Feed my lambs.” Jesus asked him again, a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter answered him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus told him, “Take care of my sheep.” Jesus asked him a third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt sad because Jesus had asked him a third time, “Do you love me?” So Peter said to him, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” ...Then Jesus told him, “Follow me.”^{Jn.21:15-19}

We are created in God's image^{Gen.1:27} and so every person is intrinsically important (especially to God), so we should make every effort to catch the “fish” and land them ashore (that is to ensure that they that they not only “make a commitment” but actually “finish the race”^{2Tim.4:7} and reach heaven!) We want to hear God say “well done”^{Matt.25:19-22} not “well what have you done”! Every Believer has been called and commissioned to help people come to faith - and continue in their faith - but sadly some people will only make it “by the skin of their teeth”: *The mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ will bring you eternal life. As you wait for his mercy, remain in God's love. Show mercy to those who doubt. Pull others out of the fire. Save them. To others, show mercy mixed with fear. Hate even the clothes that are stained by the sins of those who wear them.*^{Jude 21-13} *God has given me the grace to lay a foundation as a master builder. Now someone else is building on it. But each one should build carefully. No one can lay any other foundation than the one that has already been laid. That foundation is Jesus Christ. A person may build on it using gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay or straw. But each person's work will be shown for what it is. On judgment day it will be brought to light. It will be put through fire. The fire will test how good everyone's work is. If the building doesn't burn up, God will give the builder a reward for his work. If the building burns up, the builder will lose everything. The builder will be saved, but only like one escaping through the flames.*^{1Cor.3:10-15}

A diamond is formed when carbon-bearing materials are exposed to high pressure at a temperature of about 1,000°C. These conditions are met in two places on Earth: in the lithospheric mantle below the continental plates, and at the site of a meteorite strike.

When Eliezer was sent to find a bride for Isaac, *straw and fodder was brought for the camels,*^{Gen.24:32} and *gold and silver jewellery and articles of clothing*^{Gen.24:53} were given to Rebekah. The *hay and straw*^{1Cor.3:12} is the *food for the camels* (this is, the preaching and teaching we receive from others). Sermons are important but we can't build our life on the teaching of others - we have to transform the spiritual “fodder” we receive into our personal “jewellery” that will endure the fire of Judgement day. When the Jews tried to invoke the Name of Jesus that Paul preached they found that it didn't work! *Some Jews who went around driving out evil*

spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.^{Acts.19:13-16} We must preach the gospel that we know personally, not someone else's message! And we also need to help other people transform their carbon-bearing materials (the *fodder* of sermons) into *precious stones* (their own personal faith)! Just as diamonds are made under high pressure and heat, so when the sermons and studies are put into practice (lived out through life's stresses) with the "heat" of the Holy Spirit, *fodder* is changed into *precious stones* that we can build with and that will endure. Next Sunday we are starting a 6 week course on "The Story of Reality" to help us understand and apply the basic principles of the Gospel: **God, Man, Jesus, Cross and Resurrection**. This will help us to catch the fish more easily and more efficiently!

To fish effectively we must first of all *want* to go fishing, then we need some equipment and lastly, we need to store the fish. **We already have the desire**. At conversion we were given a new heart^{Ez.36:26} which gave us the desire to love Jesus, God's Word, each other, the people of the world and life – now and for ever. **We already have the basic equipment** and it's not expensive or complicated. Our equipment is **our mind and our mouth!** Now we just have to use them. *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*^{Rom.12:2} We are renewing our minds by focusing on God and His values: *Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.*^{Phil.4:8-}

⁹ But we have to use our mouth as well and talk about what we are thinking! *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*^{2Tim.4:1-5} Then we need a **place to store the fish** - and yes we have that too – **the Church**. The Church (the meeting of Believers in the Name of Jesus) is the storehouse - the place where we are fed and cared for. The "fish" need to be cleaned by clean people. Being clean does not mean that we never do anything wrong but that we **align our values up with God's values** (His Word). *You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*^{Jn.15:3-4} Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.^{Eph.5:26-27} That's why we use the Word of God in our Praise, Prayer and Preaching.

Our fishing (outreach) can be to large crowds, small crowds and even to individuals (like Peter catching one fish^{Matt.17:27}). But whatever our "catch" we must keep on "fishing" and we will reap a harvest of righteousness if we don't give up. *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity,*

let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.^{Gal.6:7-10} **So, I'm going fishing. Will you come too?**

Sunday 9th April 2016. Ps.70. The Story of Reality.

What is Christianity? (taken from Greg Koukl www.str.org)

To explain our faith, we must be able to give a clear, concise and credible explanation of Christianity. *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*^{1Pet.3:15-16} **Christianity is a picture of reality.** It is an account, or a description, or a depiction of the way things actually are. It is not just a **view from the inside** (a Christian's personal feelings, or religious beliefs, or spiritual affections, or ethical views, or "relationship" with God). It is also a **view of the outside**. It is a view of the world out there, of how the world really is in itself. **Put another way, Christianity is a worldview.**

All of us have beliefs about the world we think are accurate. All of us have a worldview picture—at least a rudimentary one—forming in our minds, even if we are not consciously aware of it. Religion tries to tell the story of "reality" as they see it. Every philosophy and every individual outlook on life is also a take on the way someone thinks the world actually is. There is no escaping it. These stories are meant to bring order to our beliefs, to explain the "pieces" of reality that we encounter in life, whether big things or little things, important or inconsequential.

All worldviews are not equal, though. Like a jigsaw, you must have the right pieces in the right order and from the right jigsaw or they won't fit! Some religions (world-views) have pieces that seem to fit together (internally) better than others, and some have pieces that seem to fit reality (externally) better than others. If they are good stories—that is, if they explain many things, especially the most important things, in a way consistent with our normal encounters with the world—then we have more confidence the stories are accurate, which is just another way of saying that that worldview is true.

Maths Not Bigotry. If our Story is really true in the deep sense, then it ought to be obvious that other religion stories, taken as complete pictures of the world, are simply mistaken. This does not mean, of course, they are wrong at every point. That would be a foolish mistake to make. There are many individual things a religion might teach that are sound, as far as they go. I mean, rather, that if one Story is true, all other stories taken as a whole cannot be true as well. A man once told Greg Koukl that he was probably one of those bigoted people who thought 90% of the world was wrong about their religion. He agreed with the 90% part, but told him it had more to do with maths than with bigotry. Think about this. Some religions teach Jesus is the Son of God and others deny it. Fair enough. But is it not clear that somebody is right and somebody is wrong on that score? There is simply no getting around it. The great monotheistic faiths understand God as a distinct, individual person, whereas some Eastern religions see God as the impersonal sum of everything all put together. Is it not clear that, if there is a God, both of these notions cannot be true about Him at the same time? Clearly, massive numbers of people are mistaken on one side of this issue or the other. When anyone dies, they might go to heaven, or they might go to hell, or they might be reincarnated, or they might disappear into nothing at all. But even a child can see they cannot do them all at the same time. Multitudes—the majority even—must be mistaken. Again, that's not bigotry - it's simple maths. So then, though it's the rage these days to say all religions are basically the same, it turns out not to be the case at all. **What ought to strike us, rather, is how unlike each**

other they really are. When it comes to the most important things, each religion's picture of reality is quite different from the others. And those differences simply cannot be smoothed over by invoking naïve stories about blind men and elephants that do not really get to the heart of the matter.

The Narrow Way. To many, the Christian Story seems too narrow in light of today's sensibilities and "political-correctness". Only one way to Heaven? That is nearly impossible for most people to take seriously. As one bumper sticker states: "God is too big to fit into one religion." And those who think differently think too highly of themselves and their own beliefs. Does God really care about the theological details? After all, isn't He more interested in how a person behaves than in what he believes? It might be helpful to note that even though Christians are faulted for being small-minded for this view, the idea was not invented by them. Christians promote the "narrow way" because Jesus Himself was the author of it. He made the claim repeatedly, many times in many ways. Every disciple on record whom Jesus personally trained to carry on after Him delivered the same message: *Enter God's kingdom through the narrow gate. The gate is large and the road is wide that lead to death and hell. Many people go that way. But the gate is small and the road is narrow that lead to life. Only a few people find it.*^{Matt.7:13-14} Jesus made some other very exclusive statements including: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*^{Jn.14:6} *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*^{Jn.3:18} *I can guarantee this truth: The person who doesn't enter the sheep pen through the gate but climbs in somewhere else is a thief or a robber.*^{Jn.10:1} *Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*^{Lk.9:26} *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*^{Mk.16:16}

But why would Jesus, of all people, say such things? Wasn't Jesus' main message about equality, fairness, social justice, loving our neighbours - inclusion, not exclusion? Jesus cared about those issues, which is why we find them scattered here and there within His teaching, but they were not the heart of it, not according to Him. No, there is a reason Jesus made this controversial claim about Himself, and it had nothing to do with arrogance, bigotry, or small-minded exclusion—a kind of cruel trick played on unsuspecting people to guarantee their damnation. **Rather, it had to do with the nature of reality**—a very real problem with man and his world that needed a very real solution. **Humanity is afflicted with a moral disease called sin.** Rebellion has created an enormous debt. **There is only one antidote: payment. Either Jesus pays for us, or we pay for ourselves.** It's that simple. **That is why He is the only way of salvation.** *She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus [He Saves], because he will save his people from their sins.*^{Matt.1:21} Jesus is the only one who solved the problem, since He is the only one who paid the price. *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.*^{Is.53:5} He paid so we wouldn't have to pay. This is not fantasy - it is fact. We sinned in time-space history—the real world. Jesus died in time-space history—the real world. If, you want genuine healing instead of emotional distraction or a temporary relief to relieve the distress of life, then you need a genuine Healer. **That is what Jesus offers: genuine healing, actual restoration with God, true forgiveness**— reality, not fantasy. Over the next 5 weeks we will look at the 5 basic ingredients to Christianity: God, man, Jesus, cross and the final resurrection.

Remember, Christianity is a worldview—a depiction of the way things actually are. Keep in mind that religious people, scientists, sceptics, and atheists all have worldviews they believe are true. Just believing something doesn't make it true. **Christianity is different from other stories in a significant way - Christianity is history not fiction!**

Sunday 17th April 2016. Ps.71:1-16. The Story of Reality 1. God.

The Story of Reality 1. God. (taken from Greg Koukl www.str.org)

Last week we began this series by asking: *What is Christianity?* Our answer was that **Christianity is a picture of reality or a worldview** and we began to show that although all religions have worldviews, they can't all be right. Humanity is afflicted with a moral disease called sin but there is only one antidote: **payment**. Either Jesus pays for us, or we pay for ourselves - it's that simple. And because no-one can actually pay for themselves, Jesus is the only way of salvation. *Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?*^{Lk.7:41-42} *May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance that belongs to God's holy people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins.*^{Col.1:11-14}

This is not bigotry but purely a matter of maths! **The Christian story of reality includes: 1. Creation:** How things began—ultimate reality. **2. Fall:** How things went wrong. **3. Redemption:** How to fix what went wrong. **4. Restoration:** How things get worked out. **The Christian story can be summarised in these five words: God, Man, Jesus, cross, and the final resurrection.** There is a logical order to these 5 elements. **1.** Our story starts with **God**; He created everything, including the most valuable thing in all creation: man. **2.** But something went wrong: **man** rebelled. **3.** So God set up a rescue plan. In this plan, God entered into the world that He created by becoming a man: **Jesus**. **4.** Jesus did something very special to rescue man from his problem - this happened on the **cross**. **5.** How people respond to this solution will determine what will happen to them at the final event of history: the **resurrection**. This week we are looking at the first part of the Christian story: **God**

1 The Christian story starts with God. The main Character of Christianity is God not us. Christianity is **not** about God's plan for my life but **my life for God's plan**. *From one man he made all the people of the world. Now they live all over the earth. He decided exactly when they should live. And he decided exactly where they should live. God did this so that people would seek him. Then perhaps they would reach out for him and find him. They would find him even though he is not far from any of us. 'In him we live and move and exist.'* As some of your own poets have also said, *'We are his children.'*^{Acts.17:26-28} Yes the Christian story is all about God: *In the beginning, God.*^{Gen.1:1} *Yes. I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*^{Rev.21:20}

2. There is a personal God who created everything else out of nothing. *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*^{Gen.1:1} If you make something you own it – it belongs to you. So the universe and everything in it including us, belongs to God. We don't belong to ourselves, we belong to God because He is our rightful owner (Lord). The Christian story acknowledges that Jesus is Lord: *Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*^{Phil.2:9-11}

3 God is King over all that He's created. That's what a kingdom is: a “king” and a “dom[main].” The main theme of the Bible is **Ruler-ship – God's ruler-ship, His Kingdom**. Jesus' (and His followers') main message was **the Kingdom of God** (or heaven) – what it is like and how to be part of it. *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*^{Matt.4:17} *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of*

heaven.^{Matt.5:3-19} ‘Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.’^{Matt.7:21} As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.^{Matt.10:7-8} Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than [John the Baptist].^{Matt.11:11} But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.^{Matt.12:28} The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you... The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field...^{Matt.13:11-24} Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.^{Matt.18:3-4} Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again... Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.^{Jn.3:3-5} For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (God's kingdom isn't a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness' sake. It's what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy.)^{Rom.14:17} For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power.^{1Cor.4:20} The Kingdom of God is about welcoming people back under the proper authority of God's Ownership (Lordship) so we can be restored to the relationship with God that He intended from the beginning.

4. God is distinct from His creation. Other worldviews of religions and philosophies conflict with the Christian view of reality especially in this matter. Materialism (mater-ism) views the world as only consisting of mater – of physical things. Materialism says that there is no God, no angels, no soul, no miracles, no life after death and no accountability. This is similar to the Sadducees of Jesus' time: *Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.” When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)*^{Acts.23:6-8} Some of the Eastern religions view the world as consisting of God as the “great mind” and everything else is an illusion. However, the Christian view of the world includes both matter and mind. Everything belongs to God – both matter and mind, substance and spirit, physical and non-physical and science is as valid as the soul. But God created man as a unique being, different from everything else and He made man especially valuable, because man bears God's image in a deep and profound way. *Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*^{Gen.1:26-28} The value God puts on people is the value of His Son: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*^{Jn.3:16}

The curious thing about the God of the Bible is how unlike us He is. His wisdom confuses us; His purity frightens us. He makes moral demands that we can't live up to and then threatens retribution if we don't obey. Instead of being at our beck and call, He defies manipulation. In His economy, the weak and humble prevail and the last become first. Did we or could we invent this sort of God? **No! But this is the true God.** *Be thankful. Then we can worship God in a way that pleases him. We will worship him with deep respect and wonder.*^{Heb.12:28} Next week we will look at the second element of this **Story of Reality: Man** – that is, you and me and our role in the story.

Sunday 24th April 2016. Ps.71:14-24. The Story of Reality 2. Man.

The Story of Reality 2. Man. (taken from Greg Koukl www.str.org)

Last week we saw that the Christian story starts with **God** - that He is the main Character of Christianity, not us. Christianity is not about God's plan for my life but **my life for God's plan**. Because God made the world and everything in it, He is the rightful Owner of us all and so the main theme of the Bible is Ruler-ship – God's ruler-ship, His Kingdom. This week we are looking at the next part of the Christian story which is the story of Reality the way things really are: **Man**.

Man is special because he was created by God. When God created the world, He made the visible from the invisible. *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*^{Heb.11:3} *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*^{Jn.1:1-3}

Man was created with a physical body and so we are very much like everything else in the world – material. We are not “*little gods*” or divine beings but we are dependant – we need help to live and without air, water and food we will die. (Although God says “*You are gods*”^{Ps.82:6} and Jesus quoted this verse: *Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken— what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?*^{Jn.10:34-36} the context is about **living like God** by making sound judgements, not about being little deities. If we don't live like sons of God then we will die like mere men and not sons of God!^{Ps.82:7} We are Holy Spirit filled Believers and should not act like mere men.^{1Cor.3:3-4})

Man is a non-physical spirit with a soul. Although we are creaturely **we are not junk**. We are the greatest all the creatures in the universe because there is something special about us **because we are spirit. We are a spirit, have a soul and live in a body:** *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*^{1Thes.5:23} Both man and animals have “*the breath of life*” in them (i.e. they have souls): *And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.*^{Gen.1:30} *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*^{Gen.2:7} The soul is the self-conscious part of us - our psyche or personality, will, emotions and intellect. Souls have a conscience and a sense of right and wrong (this includes non-Christians): *Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.*^{Rom.2:14-16} But man is the most noble of all creation because he is created in God's image and **God is Spirit.**^{Jn.4:24} Our spirit is the God-conscious part of us and it is our spirit that makes us different from the rest of Creation (only mankind has the ability to worship God). *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*^{Gen.1:27} God's Temple is our body - He dwells in us and our spirit is joined with Him. *Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body.*^{1Cor.16:19-20} *But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*^{1Cor.6:17} Although our will is in our soul, God's will is in our spirit and **we release God's will by praise and thanksgiving** (praise and thanksgiving are decisions of our will in our soul): *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.*^{Ps.100:4} We enter His presence as we praise God with our soul. Just as praise (*saying*

good words about God) and thanksgiving releases God's will, so saying bad things about God, grumbling and complaining quenches God's will: *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit.*^{1Thes.5:16-19} Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused.^{Nu.11:1} *Do everything without complaining or arguing. Then you will be blameless and innocent. You will be God's children without any faults among people who are crooked and corrupt.*^{Phil.2:14-15} If we are miserable, ungrateful, etc. it is because we have decided not to praise God and have forgotten all His benefits: *Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*^{Ps.103:1-3} *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*^{Ps.42:11} *God's divine power has given us everything we need for life and for godliness. This power was given to us through knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and integrity. Because of this, make every effort to add to your faith integrity, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, Christian affection and love. If you have these qualities and they are increasing, it demonstrates that your knowledge about our Lord Jesus Christ is living and productive. If these qualities aren't present in your life, you're short-sighted and have forgotten that you were cleansed from your past sins.*^{2Pet.1:3-9}

Man has a Relationship with God. The likeness between man and God makes it possible for man to have a unique friendship with God. Adam had this relationship with God and God expected to find Adam in the garden where He could walk and talk with him: *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*^{Gen.3:8-10}

Man Rebelled against God: Man is desperately fallen and needs God Himself to take action. God had made a perfect place for us to live and gave Himself to man in a special friendship. Man betrayed that friendship and rebelled, causing the Kingdom to break. Now we live in a broken world with broken relationships – which is why there is evil in the world. The Christian story (which is the Story of Reality) explains how mankind's relationship with God was broken but it also explains how it can be restored. Man broke the world through his rebellion when he sinned against the holy God. And now the King is angry. God is holy and just and could have demanded recompense immediately but chose not to. Instead, He chose to initiate a rescue plan: *God's gift is different from Adam's sin. Many people died because of the sin of that one man. But it was even more sure that God's grace would also come through one man. That man is Jesus Christ. God's gift of grace was more than enough for the whole world. The result of God's gift is different from the result of Adam's sin. God judged one sin. That brought guilt. But after many sins, God's gift made people right with him. One man sinned, and death ruled because of his sin. But we are even more sure of what will happen because of what the one man, Jesus Christ, has done. Those who receive the rich supply of God's grace will rule with Christ in his kingdom. They have received God's gift and have been made right with him. One man's sin brought guilt to all people. So also one right act made all people right with God. And all who are right with God will live. Many people were made sinners because one man did not obey. But one man did obey. That is why many people will be made right with God.*^{Rom.5:15-19}

One of the main differences between man and the rest of Creation is man's ability to make moral choices, and man used that moral freedom to rebel against his King, his Maker. That resulted in a rift in the kingdom, which made the beneficent King angry because His subjects broke His law, and those subjects came under His judgment for their crimes. So that's the conflict. However, this is only part of the Story and the Story is not over yet because God has initiated a rescue plan by coming to earth Himself to rescue humanity. Over the next few weeks, we will explore how that conflict is resolved and see the conclusion of this **Story of Reality**.

May:

Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Rev.7:10

Sunday 1st May April 2016. Ps.72. The Story of Reality 3. Jesus.

The Story of Reality 3. Jesus. (taken from Greg Koukl www.str.org)

We have seen that the Christian story starts with **God**, that He is the main Character of Christianity, not us and that Christianity is about God's Kingdom – the rulership of Jesus. Then we saw that **Man** is both physical and spiritual. We are the highest of all of Creation because we are made in God's image and unlike any other creature, we are God-conscience. We can make moral choices and man used that moral freedom to rebel against his King and Maker. That resulted in a rift in God's kingdom, which made the beneficent King angry because His subjects broke His law, and so those subjects came under His judgment for their crimes. So that's the conflict. This week we are looking at the next part of the Christian story: **Jesus**.

Jesus is a real human being. Jesus was the son of Mary and it was His conception that was super-natural rather than His birth: *But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king like his father David of long ago. He will rule forever over his people, who came from Jacob's family. His kingdom will never end."*^{Lk.1:30-33} As Jesus grew up, He developed like other children: *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*^{Lk.2:52} To the people who met Jesus, He seemed to be just another person **until** He began His ministry when His wisdom and miracles confronted them: *"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given to him? He even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son? Isn't this the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" They were not pleased with him at all.*^{Mk.6:2-3} Although fully human, **Jesus is also fully God.** *In the beginning, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the one and only Son. He came from the Father. And he was full of grace and truth.*^{Jn.1:1-14}

This is the **Incarnation** (from Latin *incarnatio*) - the **Word becoming flesh. We call this union of God and Man in Jesus the Hypostatic Union**, which means: *humanity added to God*. In the one person of Jesus the Messiah, there are two natures: His undiminished deity and His true humanity. Jesus did not come from heaven as a man but a child who had to grow and develop like other children. He ate, drank and slept and was human in every respect BUT He was more than just human – Jesus was also God. Jesus added humanity to His divine nature – He was (and is) God-Man.

This dual nature of Jesus was prophesied by Isaiah: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*^{Is.9:6} It is also prophesied by Micah: *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*^{Mi.5:2} Although God is the Father of Jesus: *You are my Son; today I have become your Father... I will be his Father and he will be my Son*^{Heb.1:5} and He is called God's *"only begotten Son,"*^{Jn.3:16} God the Father and God the Son have always pre-existed (as has God the Holy Spirit): *We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life.*^{Jn.1:1}

Early in the C4th an Elder in Alexandria, Egypt named Arius denied that Jesus was fully God and taught that God the Father, in the beginning, created (or begot) the Son. A Council was set up in Nicea (in modern day north west Turkey) to resolve the dispute and

they drafted a Creed that we now know as the Nicene Creed. This includes: *We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.* Arius' heresy is still seen today in the JW's and Mormons' teaching. An example that helps to illustrate the distinctiveness and yet the Oneness of God the Father and God the Son is the sun and light. Light is derived from the sun, yet the light and the sun exist simultaneously. Just so, the Son exists because the Father exists, but there was never a time before the Father produced the Son. We can know the sun only through the rays of light that it emits - to see the sunlight is to see the sun. Jesus says, *He who has seen me has seen the Father.*^{Jn.14:9}

Another controversy that has brought confusion is the **Kenosis** or "emptying". *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*^{Phil.2:6-8} Some Versions translate "made himself nothing" as "emptied himself" which can be misleading because although the Greek word means "empty" it also means "to give up status and privilege." Jesus did not become less than God nor did He "give up" some divine **attributes**; but rather He gave up His divine **privileges** that were rightly His as king of the universe, to become an ordinary Jewish baby bound for the cross. Jesus had every right to stay comfortably in heaven in a position of power, but His love drove Him to a position of weakness for the sake of sinful mankind. Jesus never ceased being God; He laid aside only His *privileges* of deity, not His *nature* of deity. So when Jesus became Human, He "made Himself nothing" by giving up His privileges not by giving up any part of His true deity. **Jesus is as much Human as if He were not God and as much God as if He were not Human.**

These four statements must be understood and affirmed in order to attain a complete biblical picture of the person of Jesus Christ:

1. Jesus Christ is fully and completely divine.

2. Jesus Christ is fully and completely human.

3. The divine and human natures of Christ are distinct.

4. The divine and human natures of Christ are completely united in one Person.

Why did Jesus come and what did He come to do? Jesus did not come to earth for social justice or to help the poor. No! He came mainly to solve man's problem: to rescue us and save us. *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*^{Lk.19:10} *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*^{Mk.10:45} A ransom is paid to bring people out of slavery and mankind is in slavery to sin and satan. Only a free man can set a slave free and Jesus came as a Free Man to set us free. He did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. Jesus rescues us from our imminent danger and our danger is from the Father! The Father, the King, is angry because of the man's rebellion – and properly so! *I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*^{Lk.12:4-5} *The Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*^{Heb.10:30-31}

What did Jesus ultimately do to rescue us? Jesus lived the life we should have lived. Jesus lived the perfect life without any sin or rebellion. *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess... but we have [a high priest] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*^{Heb.4:14-16} Then Jesus made a trade - His life for ours. *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} This trade-

off was at a place called *The Skull* or *Calvary* where God the Father laid on Jesus our sin. *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*^{1s.53:5}

Next week we will see how the conflict between mankind and God was resolved on the Cross. But today let's worship Jesus like Peter who said, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"^{Mat.16:16}

Sunday 8st May 2016. Ps. 73:21-28 The Story of Reality 4. Cross

The Story of Reality 4. Cross. (taken from Greg Koukl www.str.org)

We have seen the Christian Story unravel as we look at the basic ingredients of our faith: **God, man, Jesus, cross and the final resurrection.** We saw that the Christian story is the story of Reality – how we see the world – and it is not about us but about God – **In the beginning, God...** We saw how mankind is special and distinct from all creation because God made us in His image. Mankind is the highest of all creation because we are spirit, have a soul and live in a body. We were made to worship God but when man rebelled against Him, he broke that special relationship with God. However, instead of demanding immediate justice, God devised a plan to rescue us and restore us. God became human when Jesus (the Word of God) was born of Mary. Only a perfect Person could save the imperfect human race from the wrath of God against sin. And this happened upon the **Cross at Calvary**. So this is the fourth part of the Story: the **Cross** and this is the place where Jesus exchanged our sins for His Righteousness.

In Roman times when criminals were crucified, a parchment "*certificate of debt*" describing the crimes they were convicted of, was nailed to the cross to publicly display their crime. When the punishment was completed, Caesar's court cancelled the debt with a single Greek word stamped upon the parchment. And that word was *tetelestai* - meaning **finished, paid in full**.

Jesus was born *King of the Jews*^{Mat.2:2} and died with the "*certificate of debt*" to Caesar nailed to the cross, which stated: "*Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.*"^{1n.19:1} However, sedition - being *king of the Jews* - was not the crime that Jesus paid for! Hidden to all but the Father was another certificate nailed to that cross: **sin. It was our sin that was nailed to Jesus' cross:** *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*^{Col.2:13-15}

Jesus' crime was our sin, because He was made sin for us: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*^{1n.3:5} *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*^{1s.53:5-6} *He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.*^{1Pet.2:25} Jesus finished the work His Father had given Him to do. *He knew that everything was now finished. He knew that what Scripture said must come true... After Jesus drank he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and died.*^{1n.19:28-30}

³⁰ So when Jesus died saying "*it is finished*" (*Tetelestai*) it was not a dying gasp. **Jesus died with a cry of completion and the voice of victory because the price of our sins had been paid in full.** Yes, the cross makes peace – peace with God Himself: *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*^{Col.1:20}

When we accept God's trade-off of our sins for Jesus' righteousness, it is not just an academic acknowledgment of the facts but a restoration of proper ownership of our lives – we **confess that Jesus is Lord**.^{Rom.10:9-10} Remember, if you make something, you get to keep it because it's yours. God made us and now we are His – doubly His - by creation and by new-creation: *I am created by God, I am His. I am redeemed by God, I am His. I am twice His, by original right and by purchase. I belong to God!* When we realise that God is our rightful owner and we make *Jesus is Lord*^{Rom.10:9-10} our confession, our life takes on a new dimension. *As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died.*^{Gal.6:14}

As we make God's kingdom our priority, our new spiritual life with God then takes priority over our old natural life. *And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*^{Matt.6:28-34} We then begin to realize that our flesh (that is, our old self, our natural self) **has already been crucified** (not *is being* crucified or *will be* crucified). This was an actual event in history – His story – because our old self was crucified **with** Christ. *My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*^{Gal.2:20} So now it is time to stop acting like *mere humans*^{1Cor.3:3} and start living like *sons of God*.^{Psa.82:6-7}

The Israelites were forbidden to return to Egypt: *He must not make the people return to Egypt... The LORD has told you, "You must not go back there again."*^{Deut.17:16} In the Bible, Egypt is a picture of the world (i.e. our old natural life that is enslaved to the principles of this world which is under the devil's control). *That ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.*^{Rev.12:9} *We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*^{1Jn.5:18-20} Although the Israelites did not physically return to Egypt, they did return there in their hearts: *Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.*^{Acts.7:39} They yearned for the temporary benefits but forgot the cost – which was sickness, sadness and slavery, disease disappointment, despair and death. *And the people of Israel also began to complain. "Oh, for some meat!" they exclaimed. "We remember the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we wanted. But now our appetites are gone. All we ever see is this manna!"*^{Nu.11:4-6}

An Egypt experience is no different from living in Egypt! Although we may not physically return to our pre-Christian way of life, if we think the same as we did before we were Christians it is no different from being in the world! We have been given a saved mind: *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (literally a saved mind).*^{2Tim.1:7} We must train ourselves to think "saved" and to act "saved"; to think "I belong to God" and to act "I belong to God". We train ourselves by *renewing* our minds *re-vocabulising* our mouths! In other words, we make our lips do their duty and fill them with the Word of God. We make our lips say what God says about our situation and don't allow them to say anything to the contrary. *You have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth.*^{Prov.6:2} We don't have to be weird or cranky by quoting *verbatim* large

passages of Scripture but we must make our conversations agree with the spirit of the Scripture.

Life isn't fair - bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people but we must remain faithful to God, to His Kingdom and to His people. Only praise should come from our lips, that is we must say good words and especially good words about God: *Here is what sinful people are like. They don't have a care in the world. They keep getting richer and richer. It seems as if I have kept my heart pure without any reason. It didn't do me any good to wash my hands to show that I wasn't guilty of doing anything wrong. Day after day I've been in pain. God has punished me every morning. What if I had said, "I will speak as evil people do"? Then I wouldn't have been faithful to God's children.*^{Ps.73:12-15}

But if we do fail or falter then we should run **to** God not run **from** Him because it is only God who can help us, save us and sanctify us: *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*^{Heb.4:16}

Yes, Jesus exchanged our curses for His blessings; our sin for His righteousness; our punishment for His forgiveness; our death for His life; our poverty for His riches. And Jesus did this on the cross. That's why the Cross is such an important part of the Christian Story.

So let's re-affirm the great transaction of Jesus exchanging our sins for His Righteousness – then live in the benefits!

Sunday 15th 10.30am May 2016. Ps.75

The Ambassador Model. (taken from Greg Kousser www.str.org)

So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"^{2Cor.5:20}

There mostly two reasons why people don't become Christians: 1. they don't know any Christians. 2. they do know Christians! People can't see God but they can see us. We are the living Bible that others are reading. An ambassador is someone who represents the desires of his Sovereign in a foreign land. This land gets more foreign every day; it seems, more unlike God's kingdom. People are already drawing conclusions about our Sovereign by our actions and words. We are the living Bible that they are reading.

An effective ambassador has three essential skills. First, he must have some basic **knowledge**. He must know the character, mind, and purposes of his Sovereign. He should also know the message he is taking and something about the people to whom he is going but he doesn't need to be an expert. Second, this knowledge must be deployed in a skilful way. There is an element of **wisdom**, a tactical and artful diplomacy that makes his message persuasive. Third is **character**. Because an Ambassador brings himself along in everything he does, his personal maturity and individual virtue will either make or break the message.

These three areas—**knowledge, wisdom, and character**—are the three areas all Ambassadors for Christ need to continue to grow in. Sometimes the task can be confusing and even overwhelming. but breaking the job down into these three areas makes it simpler. You can lay a foundation on which you can build for the rest of your life. Plan to grow in **knowledge, tactical wisdom, and character** to be a high impact Ambassador for Jesus Christ. If you are learning and growing in these three ways, you'll be able to say with conviction, "I am an Ambassador for Jesus Christ. I can explain precisely what that means, and I can clearly defend my conviction in the truth of Christianity in an attractive manner that commends the message." It's not that hard to do, either, when you cultivate a sensible faith by increasing your knowledge, sharpening your tactical wisdom, and building your character.

Knowledge is an accurately informed mind We don't need to be a theologian, but we can't know nothing! The knowledge that is essential for an Ambassador to have, is

knowledge of the questions and knowledge of the answers. The questions may differ from generation to generation but the answers stay the same. *We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.*^{2Cor.10:3-5}

Christians have a view of reality that includes God's provision and protection but there are many other competing views of reality in the world and it is easy to be taken in by them if we don't know what they are. There are three basic world-views that compete with the true view of reality.

Materialism. This is the world-view that the only things that exist are material or physical – that this world is governed by natural laws. Atheism says: *In the beginning, molecules...*

Relativism. This is the world-view that morality is a human invention that we reached through evolution. There is no absolute morality and no God to set any standards.

Pluralism. This is the world-view of relativism applied to religion – that all religions are equally valid to get to God. You have no right to claim that Jesus is the only way to salvation.

If we don't understand these false arguments of human reasoning, it is very hard not to be taken in by them. In spiritual warfare, we fight with the weapons of Truth. Our warfare is not against demons but against the demonic ideas that get into people's minds and persuade them to believe things other than the truth of Christ. We must have accurate thoughts to combat and pull down the theories that are opposed to God. Our understanding of the Truth becomes a weapon to defeat the enemy – the ideas of Materialism, Relativism and Pluralism. We are not just on the defensive but are able to go on the offensive and show them to be false.

Know the truth and know how to read our Bibles accurately in context. Never read a Bible verse - always read a paragraph, or more. Don't try to get the meaning in isolation from the rest of the passage. **Know the error by having some familiarity with the obstacles, the "speculations," the ideas hostile to true knowledge of God, knowledge of how our answers answer the questions.**

Wisdom – a skilful, tactical, fair and diplomatic use of knowledge. We should manoeuvre in our conversation (tactics) not just dump information on people. We use our knowledge with cleverness, skill and tact, clarifying our case in a way that makes it intelligible and persuasive. **Tactics** enable us to manoeuvre and put us in the driver's seat. In many cases good use of tactics will enable us to stop a challenger in his tracks, turn the tables, and get him thinking. Example: *"You shouldn't judge."* *"Why not?"* *"Because it's wrong to judge."* *"Then why are you judging me right now?"* **Clarity** and persuasiveness is being able to present the truth in an unambiguous and compelling way. *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*^{Col.4:6}

Question: How best can I communicate so others understand and respond? **Don't say,** *"If you don't believe in Jesus, you'll go to hell."* **It's confusing.** This is true as far as it goes, but it's largely incoherent to non-Christians. It doesn't give an accurate sense of what's going on; i.e. *"Jesus died for your sins."* *"I'm really sorry He did that."* This makes God seem petty instead of merciful. God is going to send us to hell for eternity because of a theological idiosyncrasy? *"Doesn't God care more about how I live than what I believe?"* The biblical view, though, is not a narrow-minded, bigoted attempt on God's part to try to get people into hell. **There's a better way to make the point more accurately.** We should give an accurate sense of why the cross is important and why Jesus is actually necessary, showing God as merciful, not petty. Not, *"If you don't believe in Jesus you go to hell."* Rather, *"If you don't receive a pardon for your crimes, you'll be punished as you know you should be."* Notice the order:

First the bad news, then the good news. **Who cares about insulin?** People don't care about insulin unless they have diabetes. They don't care about the benefit unless they know they're sick. Anything else turns Jesus from insulin into ice cream. You see, the former approach confuses the doctor with the disease. The obituary doesn't read, "*Cause of Death: Stupidity. He didn't go to the doctor.*" It's the disease—sin—that kills, not the lack of a doctor. The fact is, every person already knows that they are guilty and they hunger for forgiveness. It's not our goal to get to the Cross in every encounter. Some people are not prepared for that much information, but will need to consider the first few steps before the later steps can make any sense. We are just one of the pieces of the message that **God** is putting together to confront others with Christ. *I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.*^{1Cor.3:6} Our goal is to put a stone in their shoe—to give them something to think about. **Summary:** Tactical wisdom involves taking a message that's meaningful to us and making it meaningful, coherent, and clear to the non-Christian. It means communicating in a way they can understand. Of course, this means we have to understand it first. So an artful method entails not only skill at manoeuvring in the conversation, but also making the case clearly, intelligibly, and persuasively.

Character - a warm, attractive and inviting manner. **Two extremes:** We're so nice we won't say anything that could possibly offend anyone. Or we don't care what anybody thinks, so we offend everyone. **Middle ground:** Be a "*velvet covered brick,*" weighty and strong, but with soft edges. We are not to be bullies. We should be gentle and reverent, not quarrelsome, but kind, patiently correcting those in error. *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*^{1Pet.3:15-16} We should be patient not quarrelsome: *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,*^{2Tim.2:24-25} Arguments—principled disagreements about matters of fact—are good things. There are lots of good arguments in the Bible. But we are not to be acrimonious, nasty, or harsh, fighting for the fight's sake. We should be warm, attractive, and inviting. Let's get rid of tired, worn-out words and phrases that have ceased to communicate something specific. Trade the Christian lingo and put-on Christian affect for a rich, crisp, clean personality i.e. genuine, healthy, balanced, winsome, attractive, likable human beings. **The Gospel is offensive enough so don't add any more offense to it but we dare not remove the offense inherent to the Gospel.** Whenever people want to make Christianity kinder and gentler they start tinkering with the message. To keep people from stumbling, sometimes they remove the stumbling block of the cross. Jesus is insulin, not ice cream. Jesus said He was the only way and that's not our claim - **it's His**. If anyone objects, they have to take it up with Him. The message of the cross is an offense and foolishness to those who are perishing.^{1Pet.2:8; 1Cor.1:18.} Make peace today with the fact that if you're faithful to the message you will be persecuted at some level. Make up your mind in advance to value God's approval over man's. **Disagree by offering an alternative and then invite a principled response:** "*I wouldn't characterize it that way. Here's what I think may be a better or more accurate way to look at it.*" "*Let me suggest an alternative and tell me if it isn't an improvement. Tell me why you think the other alternative is better.*" "*Have you thought about or considered another alternative?*" "*I don't think that's going to work, and here's why.*" "*I'm not sure I agree with the way you put it. Think about this....*"

We are ambassadors. We are sent by God as ambassadors for Jesus Christ, just as if God were speaking through us. To be effective, we need to be growing in three areas:

Knowledge: An accurately informed mind. **Wisdom:** An artful method. **Character:** A warm, attractive, and inviting manner. **Don't be a Christian Homer Simpson.** Simply put, "Give 'em heaven."

Sunday 22nd May 2016. Ps.76

The Story of Reality 5. Final Resurrection. (taken from Greg Koukl www.str.org)

For a good story you have to have a **beginning**, a **conflict** which has to be **resolved** and then the story ends: "They lived happily ever after." These are essential parts of all good stories. The Christian story has those elements as well. The **Beginning: creation**; the **Problem: the fall**; the **Solution: redemption**; and the **Resolution: the final resurrection**. Here is the way the story goes for Christianity. There is a personal God who created everything else out of nothing. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." He made it all. He is the king over that which He's made. That's what a *kingdom* is: a "king" and a "dom." He created man as a unique being, different from everything else. He made man especially valuable, in that man bears God's image in some deep and profound way. One aspect is man's ability to make moral choices, and man used that moral freedom to rebel against his King, his Maker. That resulted in a rift in the kingdom, which made the beneficent King angry because His subjects broke His law, and those subjects came under His judgment for their crimes. So that's the **conflict**. The **solution** is that God acted to become a man Himself in Jesus to rescue man by giving Himself as a payment for the crimes man committed. This is what Theologians call *substitutionary or vicarious atonement*. God paid, in the person of Jesus, to rescue man. And those who respond to the offer of pardon by putting their trust in Jesus the **God-Man**, receive a complete pardon which they didn't deserve - and that's an act of mercy and grace. However, the story does not end there because there is the **resolution** to the Story, which is **the final Resurrection**.

The good news about the **final resurrection** is that **everyone lives for ever!** And **the bad news** about the **final resurrection** is that **everyone lives for ever!** Our story of reality does not end with: "they all lived happily ever after" because there is a coming day of judgement where the righteous will rise to eternal life and the unrighteous will rise to eternal punishment. (*Eternity will not be like a thousand years, followed by another thousand years, and then another thousand years. No! Eternity is outside of time and so it will be like now - but without ever ending.*) Note that all human beings will be raised from the dead as imperishable and immortal: *the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*^{1Cor.15:53}

All who have received mercy in Christ will receive their eternal reward. All those who have rejected God's mercy in Christ will be judged for what they have done and receive their eternal punishment. *But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world... Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons... And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.*^{Matt.25:31-}

⁴⁶ Those who humble themselves, surrender to God and submit to the Righteous King will receive **perfect mercy** because they have accepted God's forgiveness. It will be as God had originally intended for us to live – in perfect harmony, peace and joy, for ever and for ever. But those who those who refuse God's forgiveness and continue in their rebellion will receive **perfect justice** in their punishment for every sin they have committed against their rightful owner. Now immortal human beings, they will be banished forever to a place of punishment, torment, and interminable isolation from God

for their crimes - and the torment is real and terrible. Both conditions – peace or punishment - last for eternity, for ever and for ever. These are the two options that we are faced with in the final resurrection: **perfect mercy** or **perfect justice** but the choice is made now!

God is Spirit,^{Jn.4:24} and His Spirit is eternal: *But Christ offered himself to God without any flaw. He did this through the power of the eternal Holy Spirit.*^{Heb.9:14} This means that our spirit (the God-conscious part of us that was originally made in God's image) is also eternal: *He has also set eternity in the human heart,*^{Ecc.3:11} Angels are also spirit: *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*^{Heb.1:14} Because spirit is not matter it is eternal and cannot be annihilated or destroyed. That is why angels and humans live forever. Humans have bodies which are mortal and will completely perish when we die but our spirit does not perish - we will be clothed with an immortal body at the final resurrection. *We know that the earthly tent we live in will be destroyed. But we have a building made by God. It is a house in heaven that lasts forever. Human hands did not build it. During our time on earth we groan. We long to put on our house in heaven as if it were clothing. Then we will not be naked. While we live in this tent of ours, we groan under our heavy load. We don't want to be naked. We want to be dressed with our house in heaven. What must die will be swallowed up by life. God has made us for that very purpose. He has given us the Holy Spirit as a down payment. The Spirit makes us sure of what is still to come. So here is what we can always be certain about. As long as we are at home in our bodies, we are away from the Lord. We live by believing, not by seeing. We are certain about that. We would rather be away from our bodies and at home with the Lord. So we try our best to please him. We want to please him whether we are at home in our bodies or away from them. We must all stand in front of Christ to be judged. Each one of us will be judged for the good things and the bad things we do while we are in our bodies. Then each of us will receive what we are supposed to get.*^{1Cor.5:1-10}

The devil is a created spirit, similar to God's angels and so he cannot be annihilated either: *One day angels came to the LORD. Satan also came with them.*^{Job.1:6} When the devil and his angels rebelled against God (possibly a third of heaven's angels) they were cast down from heaven: *How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning!*^{Is.14:12} *Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth... Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*^{Rev.12:4-9} So God has prepared hell as a place of containment for the devil and his angels. *God didn't spare angels who sinned. He threw them into hell, where he has secured them with chains of darkness and is holding them for judgment.*^{2Pet.2:4} Hell was made for the devil, not people **BUT** hell will be the final destination of those who continue in their rebellion against God. *Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*^{Matt.25:41}

The Christian story has five main elements: **God, man, Jesus, the cross, the resurrection**. It's a story that can be told in single a sentence: **God**, the Creator of the universe, created **man** to fellowship with Him but he rebelled and in order to rescue man from punishment for his rebellion God took on humanity in **Jesus**, the Saviour to die on a **cross** and rise from the dead so that in the **final resurrection**, we could enjoy a wonderful friendship with our Sovereign Lord, in the kind of perfect world our hearts have always yearned for. But it's not just a story, it's a true story - the story of reality.

Does it really matter if we understand this story of reality? Have you ever had a salesman try to sell you something that you really don't need? How much time do you give that salesman? How much do you really pay attention to what he is saying? On the other hand, if this man offered you something that you desperately needed, you would listen intently

to what he had to say! We need a proper understanding of our world so that we can have a correct understanding of our spiritual need. And it is this understanding that shapes our love and awe of God, our gratitude for Salvation and our love of the Saviour. But because the conflict has truly been resolved, we can be sure that **our** story will end: “*They lived happily ever after.*”

June:

Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen! Rev.7:12

July:

We give thanks to You Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. Rev.11:17

August:

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. Rev.12:10

September:

Great and marvellous are Your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, King of the ages. Rev.15:3

October:

Who will not fear You, O Lord and bring glory to Your name? For You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed. Rev.15:4

November:

Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Rev.19:6-7

December:

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory. Is.6:3

Bible Time Chart

Time Chart of OT

1270BC	Exodus under Ramesses 2 (<i>also called Ramesses the Great</i>)
1000BC	David
722BC	Israel's (<i>Northern Kingdom</i>) Exile 2Kings 17:6
597/6BC	Judah's (<i>Southern Kingdom</i>) 1 st Exile 2Kings24:10-17
586BC	Judah's (<i>Southern Kingdom</i>) 2 nd Exile 2Kings25:1-21
537BC	Judah's (<i>Southern Kingdom</i>) Return from Exile

Time Chart of NT

20/19BC	<i>Herod's Temple began</i>
18/17BC	<i>Herod's Temple in use</i>
c8BC	Zechariah in the Temple (Lk.1)
5BC April 5 th	Birth of Jesus
4BC	<i>Death of Herod the Great</i>
AD14 -37	<i>Reign of Tiberius Caesar</i>
AD29	Baptism of Jesus (<i>Lk.3:1 – 15th year of Tiberius reign hence AD 29</i>)**
AD33 April Wed. 1 st	Last Supper (see Colin Humphreys' " <i>The Mystery of the Last Supper</i> ")
AD33 April Fri. 3 rd	Crucifixion of Jesus
c AD35	Conversion of Paul <i>Acts 9</i>
<AD37	<i>Christianity came to Britain. ***</i>
AD37-41	<i>Reign of Caligula</i>
AD41-54	<i>Reign of Claudius</i>
c AD44	<i>Death of Herod Agrippa 1</i>
< AD50	Letter of James
AD48-49	Paul's 1 st missionary journey
AD49/50	Jerusalem Conference <i>Acts. 15</i>
AD50	Paul's 2 nd missionary journey
AD50-52	Paul at Corinth
AD51	1 & 2 Thessalonians from Corinth
AD52	Galatians from Corinth
AD54	Paul's 3 rd missionary journey
AD54 -68	<i>Reign of Nero</i>
AD54-57	Paul at Ephesus
AD57	1Corinthians from Ephesus
AD57	2Corinthians from Macedonia
AD57/58	Romans from Corinth
AD58-60	Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea
AD58	Paul's arrest at Jerusalem
AD60-61	Paul winters at Malta
AD61	Paul arrives at Rome
AD61-63	Paul's imprisonment at Rome
AD62	Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon from Rome
AD63	Philippians from Rome
AD63-65	Paul's release & further ministry
AD63	1Timothy & Titus
AD64	Hebrews
AD64	<i>Herod's Temple finished</i>
<AD65	Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts

<AD65	Revelation****
AD64-68	1 & 2 Peter from Rome
AD65	Peter's death in Rome
AD66	Paul's 2 nd imprisonment at Rome
AD66	2 Timothy from Rome
AD66/67	Paul's death at Rome
AD67/68	Jude
<i>AD68</i>	<i>Death of Nero</i>
<i>AD68-69</i>	<i>Reign of Galba</i>
<i>AD69</i>	<i>Reign of Otho</i>
<i>AD69</i>	<i>Reign of Vitellius</i>
<i>AD69-79</i>	<i>Reign of Vespasian</i>
<i>AD70</i>	<i>Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus</i>
<i>AD79-81</i>	<i>Reign of Titus</i>
<AD98	Gospel John, 1, 2, & 3 John
AD98/100	Death of John
<i>AD81-96</i>	<i>Reign of Domitian</i>

****** Besides the dating from Tiberius, Daniel had stated that it would be 69 “*weeks*” before Messiah would appear from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:26). Accepting that a “*week*” represents seven years and the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was given around 455 BC (during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah), a specific period of 483 years (69 x 7) was to elapse before the Messiah would appear, dating Jesus’ Baptism at AD29 (*there is no date of 0BC or AD0*)

******* Gildas (A.D. 516-570) a British Historian, states, *Meanwhile, these islands ... received the beams of light that is, the Holy precepts of Christ, the true Sun at the latter part, as we know, of the reign of Tiberius Caesar* Roman Emperor A.D. 14-37

****** Reasons for early date for Revelation:**

42 months = the period between 64AD and 66AD when Nero embarked on the most violent campaign against Christians martyring multitudes.

666 = six hundred and sixty-six, not six, six, six. It is the numerical value of “*Caesar Nero*” The “*temple*” in the “*holy city*” is still standing as John writes, though it is being threatened with devastation (Rev. 11: 1-2). We know as a matter of historical fact that the Jewish temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, and has never been rebuilt. (2) The sixth “*king*” is presently ruling from the “*seven mountains*” and will do so until a king comes who will reign a “*short time*” (Rev. 17:9-10). The preterist takes this to be a clear enough allusion to Nero Caesar. According to the enumeration found in Josephus' *Antiquities* (18:2:2,6, 10) and Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Nero is Rome's sixth emperor, following Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius.

“...the cryptic number 666 (Revelation 13:18) designates Nero. The number involves the use of gematria (assigning numerical values to letters of the alphabet and thus determining the numerical value of words). Nero Caesar written in Hebrew letters has the numerical value of 666. That explanation becomes all the more probable when you realize that in Hebrew, Nero can also be spelled Neron. With the second “*n*” the numerical value is 666. Without it, 616 (a well-attested reading in some New Testament manuscripts).” J. Stewart Russell, *The Parousia*

"It is with great satisfaction that he finds himself in substantial agreement with the distinguished ecclesiastical historian and theologian, Dr. Dollinger, of Munich, in his interpretation of St. Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians. (1) Dr. Dollinger distinctly identifies the "*Man of Sin*" with Nero, a conclusion now so generally accepted by the highest authorities, that it may be regarded as a settled point. (2) He clearly distinguishes between the "*Man of Sin*" and "*the Apostasy*," so frequently confounded by the mass of interpreters. Dollinger shows that the former is a person, the latter a heresy. (3) He recognizes "*the Beast*" of the Apocalypse as the Emperor, and therefore identical with the "*Man of Sin*." (4) The miracles wrought by the "*Second Beast*" (the Beast from the earth) he regards as a representation derived from our Lord's prophecy on the Mount of Olives." (*The Parousia, Afterword.*)

The seven seals are shown to have taken place during the reign of the Emperors Augustus to Vespasian. The seven trumpets during the time when Rome placed 4 battalions at the Euphrates River (Rev. 9:14). The seven bowls, when Nero was Emperor (Rev. 17:10). But Revelation 20 makes the point that there is a long time gap between Jerusalem being judged and the events described in verse 9 by its use of the term "thousand years".

A. Corbett: Revelation.

Memory Verses 2016 Heavenly Songs

January: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. *Rev.4:8*

February: You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being. *Rev.4:11*

March: Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise! *Rev.5:12*

April: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever! *Rev.5:13*

May: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. *Rev.7:10*

June: Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen! *Rev.7:12*

July: We give thanks to You Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. *Rev.11:17*

August: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. *Rev.12:10*

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