

# Deal Pentecostal Church Sermon Outlines 2018

## Prayer for 2018

Lord, May our walk with You this year remain simple, strong, and sound,  
then we will finish the year bigger, better and more blessed  
than when we started—and full of faith and the Holy Spirit!

In Jesus Name.

Amen.

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**Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him.**

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**Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies  
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**For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.**

**So you also are complete through your union with Christ,  
who is the head over every ruler and authority.**

Col.2:6-10



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## January:

The LORD is good. When people are in trouble, they can go to Him for safety. He takes good care of those who trust in Him. Nahum 1:7

### Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Ps.131.

Last year my goal was to know Jesus Christ better: *I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, **so that you may know him better**. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*<sup>Eph.1:16-21</sup> Although God's grace is entirely free (which is the definition of grace), we must work at knowing Christ better because knowledge is attained through study, work and perseverance! Reflecting on last year, I trust that we all know Christ better because we have **listened** to the Word of Christ and then **obeyed** the Word of Christ by putting God's Word into practice.

When we became a Christian, we made an announcement that we would live as God wants us to live because the Lord is now our God and God also made an announcement that we are His people who are set apart for Him: *Today you have announced that the LORD is your God. You have said you would live exactly as he wants you to live. You have agreed to keep his rules, commands and laws. And you have said you would obey him. Today the LORD has announced that you are his people. He has said that you are his special treasure. He promised that you would be. He has told you to keep all of his commands. He has announced that he will make you famous. He'll give you more praise and honour than all of the other nations he has made. And he has said that you will be a holy nation. The LORD your God has set you apart for himself. That's exactly what he promised to do.*<sup>Deut.26:17-19</sup> As we saw last year, a holy God and unholy people are combustible not compatible and so once we have been made right with God and are called "holy" (set apart for God) we must live holy lives: *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."*<sup>2Cor.6:14-18</sup>

Living as God wants us to live means staying in fellowship with Him and walking along life's journey with Him: *the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*<sup>Mic.6:8</sup> The Greek word translated "prosperity" literally means "to have a good journey": *Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*<sup>3Jn.1:2</sup> and so true prosperity is walking along life's journey with God. Adam did not walk with God and hid because he was afraid: *When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid."*<sup>Gen.3:8-10</sup> But Enoch did walk with God: *Enoch walked with God. Then he couldn't be found, because God took him from this life.*<sup>Gen.5:24</sup> However, we will only walk with God if we have agreed to do so: *Do two people walk together unless they've agreed to do so?*<sup>Amos.5:3</sup> There is no greater achievement in life than to walk with God—which means fellowshiping with God daily right up to our last breath. All our other achievements amount to nothing in comparison to the eternal plans of God—at best our other achievements will only be discovering what God

has already done (and then utilising it)—and at worst our other achievements will be destroying what God has already done. *For in him we live and move and have our being.*<sup>Acts.17:28</sup> LORD, you will grant us peace; all we have accomplished is really from you. O LORD our God, others have ruled us, but you alone are the one we worship.<sup>Is.26:12-13</sup>

This year, my goal is to become more radical because “radical” means “to go back to our roots” (the word *radical* is from the Latin *rādx* meaning *root*). Going back to the roots of our faith (not just religion) means that we can keep our walk with God simple and uncomplicated yet strong and uncompromising. *Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.*<sup>Heb.6:18-20</sup> For a tree to be strong and stable it must have sound roots and if we are going to be strong and stable in our faith, we too must have sound roots. *And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.*<sup>Col.2:6-10</sup> If we are going to grow up in Christ we must also grow down in Him too, and so as we return to our roots, we will remain strong and secure. Because our anchor is secure, we will be able to withstand any attack from the evil one and refute deceptive philosophies that some dress up as theology!

**And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him.** We must continue as we started—by honouring and reverencing Jesus as Lord.

**Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him.** Our private and public lives must be built on Jesus by honouring and reverencing Jesus with our thoughts and talk; with our lips and lives. *But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*<sup>1Cor.3:10-11</sup>

**Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.** Trust, truth, and thankfulness are joined together. When one or more of these three essential qualities are absent or abandoned, we become weak and vulnerable

**Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.** We should always remember that faith—trust in God—is like a child's trust in his parent. *I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.*<sup>Matt.18:3</sup> Most of us can be confused by clever sounding arguments and sometimes we must rely on our sanctified conscience and follow the intuition of our spirit as we are moved by the Holy Spirit. However, unless we stay in fellowship with God, His Word, and His people, we will not know the difference between the Holy Spirit's prompting and our own presumption.

**For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.** God became human and now we can always fellowship with Him because He became like us: *“Here I am. Here are the children God has given me.” Those children have bodies made out of flesh and blood. So Jesus became human like them in order to die for them... So he had to be made like his brothers in every way. Then he could serve God as a kind and faithful high priest. And then he could pay for the sins of the people by dying for them... Now he is able to help others who are being tempted.*<sup>Heb.2:13-18</sup>

**So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.** We are already complete but we must end as we started—by honouring and reverencing Jesus as Lord.

**Going back to our roots maybe “radical” but it is not complicated**, so this year, let’s keep our walk with God, simple, strong, and sound. Then we will finish the year bigger, better and more blessed than when we started—and full of faith and the Holy Spirit!

## **Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Ps.132. Mark 1**

Last week I said that my goal for this year is to be more radical and to return to the roots of our faith—not our religion (*radical means to go back to the root*).

John Knox died on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1572. Early in the afternoon he said: ‘Now for the last time, I commend my spirit, soul and body’ (pointing his three fingers) ‘into Thy hands, O Lord’. Thereafter, about five o’clock he said to his wife: “Go, read where I cast my first anchor!”

She did not need to be told and read the seventeenth of John’s evangel: *Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Here was a strange and striking contrast! ‘Life Eternal!’ ‘Life Eternal!’ says the Book. Now listen to the laboured breathing from the bed! The bed speaks of Death; the Book speaks of Life Everlasting! ‘Life!’ the dying man starts as the great cadences fall upon his ear. ‘This is eternal life that they might know You!’ ‘Life Eternal!’ ‘It was there’ he declares with his last breath, ‘it was there that I cast my first anchor.’

*(A Bunch of Everlastings, John Knox’s Text, by F.W. Boreham)*

### **Where have you cast your first anchor?**

So let’s start at the beginning—when John the Baptist started preaching, he preached *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>Mk.1:4</sup> Jesus had the same message: *The time has come and the kingdom of God is near. Change the way you think and act [repent], and believe the Good News.*<sup>Mk.1:15</sup> Jesus later said that this message would be preached across the whole world: *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and remission (forgiveness) of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised.*<sup>Lk.24:45-49</sup>

Repentance acknowledges the truth and Jesus is the truth<sup>Jn.14:6</sup> (He is the only way to access God’s forgiveness): *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, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*<sup>2Tim.2:24-26</sup> Although **God’s love is unconditional**, **God’s forgiveness is conditional**—**His forgiveness is conditional upon repentance**. Repentance and remission are inseparably joined and there is no forgiveness without repentance. *God exalted Jesus to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.*<sup>Acts.5:37</sup>

**True repentance will always include these five A’s:** **1 Acknowledgement** of the wrong. **2 Apology** for the wrong. **3 Action** of determination to change. **4 Appreciation** of God’s forgiveness. **5 Attitude** of grace, gratitude and gentleness towards God and people.

**1 Acknowledgement of the wrong.** Sin is missing God’s standard<sup>Rom.3:23</sup> which is perfect love, perfect holiness and perfect righteousness. Until we confess our sin we won’t receive forgiveness of our sin<sup>1Jn.1:9</sup> but our salvation depends on us confessing Jesus as Lord,<sup>Rom.10:9-10; Matt.10:32-33</sup> not on us confessing all our sin—otherwise salvation would then depend upon the effectiveness of our memory! Under the old Covenant every time someone approached God, they had to confess their sin because that is what stood between them and God. In the new



Covenant we have to confess Jesus because that is who now stands between us and God. Sin no longer stands between man and God because Jesus' work of taking away the sin of the world was a success. If sin is still there, then Jesus' work is a failure. If we must confess all our sin to be saved, what would happen if we forgot one sin? How could we ever be sure that we had remembered them all? What would happen to those who died before they had a chance to confess just one sin? If we must confess every sin or else be unforgiven, would that mean that we would be lost forever and go to hell? Nonsense! Forgiveness is ours through what Jesus has already done. We are the forgiven because we have placed our faith in Jesus as Saviour and not because we remembered to confess every sin we ever have done. <sup>Eph.1:7;Col.2:13</sup>

2 **Apology for the wrong.** Unless we acknowledge and apologise for our sin we haven't really admitted we have done wrong against God. *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.* <sup>2Cor.7:10-11</sup>

3 **Action of determination to change.** God does not require that we change completely straight away—just that we genuinely **intend to change our ways**. *Be alert. If you see your friend going wrong, correct him. If he responds, forgive him. Even if it's personal against you and repeated seven times through the day, and seven times he says, 'I'm sorry, I won't do it again,' forgive him.* <sup>Lk.17:3-4</sup> Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven." <sup>Matt.18:21-22</sup>

4 **Appreciation of God's forgiveness.** If we don't appreciate what God has done in forgiving our sins—and show our appreciation for our forgiveness—we are saying Jesus' death is of no consequence to us: *What do you think a person who shows no respect for the Son of God deserves? That person looks at the blood of the promise (the blood that made him holy) as no different from other people's blood, and he insults the Spirit that God gave us out of his kindness.* <sup>Heb.10:29</sup>

5 **Attitude of grace, gratitude and gentleness towards God and people.** *We love because God loved us first. Whoever says, "I love God," but hates another believer is a liar. People who don't love other believers, whom they have seen, can't love God, whom they have not seen. Christ has given us this commandment: The person who loves God must also love other believers.* <sup>1Jn.4:19-21</sup> *Forgive people when they sin against you. If you do, your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* <sup>Matt.6:14-15</sup>

Although **salvation** (God's grace) is **free**, **sanctification** (maturity) is a combination of **God working in us and us working out our salvation**—we must make every effort to add to what God has done in our lives: *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. If you keep doing this, you will never fall away. Then you will also be given the wealth of entering into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Therefore, I will always remind you about these qualities, although you already know about them and are well-grounded in the truth that you now have. As long as I'm still alive, I think it's right to refresh your memory.* <sup>2Pet.1:5-13</sup> If our life contradicts our faith, we have forgotten that God has forgiven our sins and show contempt for God's grace: *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?* <sup>2Rom.2:4</sup>

Jesus did not restrict His preaching to a few people in one place but went throughout the land: *But Jesus replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came."*

*So he travelled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.*<sup>Mk.1:38-39</sup>

This preaching is not reserved for Jesus or His 12 Disciples but is the calling of everyone who has had an encounter with Jesus: *But the man went and spread the word, proclaiming to everyone what had happened.*<sup>Mk.1:45</sup> *I pray that you will be active in sharing what you believe. Then you will completely understand every good thing we have in Christ.*<sup>Phil.1:6</sup> God still wants everyone to hear the Good News:

*Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned.*<sup>Mk.16:15-16</sup> *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*<sup>2Pet.3:9</sup> However, this preaching of repentance is not repressive but redemptive: *Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*<sup>Lk.5:31-32</sup>

When John the Baptist preached repentance it was described as an **exhortation**: *There he preached that people should be baptized and turn away from their sins. Then God would forgive them... With many other encouraging words, he told the Good News to the people.*<sup>Lk.3:3;18</sup> Charles G Finney was a C19<sup>th</sup> preacher who saw many thousands come to salvation through his preaching on repentance and even though he was very blunt in his preaching, he showed great joy when people were convicted of their sin and came to salvation through repentance:

*While I was relating these facts, I observed the people looking as if they were angry. Many of the men were in their shirt sleeves; and they looked at each other and at me, as if they were ready to fall upon me and chastise me on the spot. I saw their strange and unaccountable looks, and could not understand what I was saying, that had offended them. However, it seemed to me that their anger rose higher and higher, as I continued the narrative. As soon as I had finished the narrative, I turned upon them and said, that I understood that they had never had a religious meeting in that place; and that therefore I had a right to take it for granted, and was compelled to take it for granted, that they were an ungodly people. I pressed that home upon them with more and more energy, with my heart full almost to bursting. I had not spoken to them in this strain of direct application, I should think, more than a quarter of an hour, when all at once an awful solemnity seemed to settle down upon them; the congregation began to fall from their seats in every direction, and cried for mercy. If I had had a sword in each hand, I could not have cut them off their seats as fast as they fell. Indeed nearly the whole congregation were either on their knees or prostrate, I should think, in less than two minutes from this first shock that fell upon them. Every one prayed for himself, who was able to speak at all. Of course, I was obliged to stop preaching; for they no longer paid any attention. I saw the old man who had invited me there to preach, sitting about in the middle of the house, and looking around with utter amazement. I raised my voice almost to a scream, to make him hear, and pointing to him said, "Can't you pray?" He instantly fell upon his knees, and with a stentorian voice poured himself out to God; but he did not at all get the attention of the people. I then spoke as loud as I could, and tried to make them attend to me. I said to them, "You are not in hell yet; and now let me direct you to Christ." For a few moments I tried to hold forth the Gospel to them; but scarcely any of them paid any attention. My heart was so overflowing with joy at such a scene that I could hardly contain myself. It was with much difficulty that I refrained from shouting, and giving glory to God.* Charles G Finney 1792 - 1875

Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached the **Good News of Repentance** for the forgiveness of sins and it was the practice the early Church— so let's make the **Good News of Repentance** our practice and our anchor—and like Finney *overflow with joy* as well!

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2018. Ps.133. Mark 2**

**My child, your sins are forgiven.**<sup>Mk.2:5</sup>

The **greatest commandment** is to *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*<sup>Matt.22:36</sup> Another Version says: *Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.* But our **greatest concern** should be to have our sins forgiven because until the Holy Spirit gives us the assurance that our sins are forgiven, we will not be able to truly express our love for God or fellowship with Him. *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.<sup>1Cor.2:14</sup>

Last week we saw that John **preached** a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>Mk.1:4</sup> This was not just a good idea of John's but it had been prophesied by Isaiah hundreds of years previously: *A messenger is calling out in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord.'*<sup>Lk.3:4</sup> Preparing the way for the Lord is **preaching** repentance for the forgiveness of sins and this preaching should remove obstacles that block our view of the Saviour. *Make straight paths for him. Every valley will be filled in. Every mountain and hill will be made level. The crooked roads will become straight. The rough ways will become smooth. And everyone will see God's salvation.*<sup>Lk.3:5-6</sup> A holy God and unholy people are not compatible but combustible,<sup>Heb.10:31</sup> which is why we must be made holy, and this requires a new start—a new birth. Obviously, this cannot be a new physical start as we cannot travel back in time. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that we must be born again spiritually not physically.<sup>Jn.3</sup> This “new birth” or conversion, is a spiritual miracle where God becomes our Father and we become His children so we can now address God as **our Father**.<sup>Matt.6:9</sup> *But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.*<sup>Gal.4:4-7</sup> When God forgives our sins He changes us on the inside: *I'll give you a new heart, put a new spirit in you. I'll remove the stone heart from your body and replace it with a heart that's God-willed, not self-willed. I'll put my Spirit in you and make it possible for you to do what I tell you.*<sup>Ezek.36:26-27</sup> *This new plan I'm making with Israel isn't going to be written on paper, isn't going to be chiselled in stone; This time I'm writing out the plan in them, carving it on the lining of their hearts. I'll be their God, they'll be my people... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*<sup>Heb.8:10-12</sup>

God wants us to know that our sins are forgiven. *I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*<sup>Mk.2:10</sup> *I'm writing these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God. I'm doing it so you will know that you have eternal life.*<sup>Jn.5:13</sup> Sins can only be forgiven by God: *But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!"*<sup>Mk.2:6-7</sup> (So when Jesus said “Son, your sins are forgiven”<sup>Mk.2:5</sup> He was declaring His Deity.) But although we cannot forgive sins, we can proclaim what God has already decided and done, including the forgiveness of sins. *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven.*<sup>Matt.16:19</sup> *And after he said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained."*<sup>Jn.20:22-23</sup> The Old Covenant never actually forgave anybody's sins or dealt with their conscience. *Under this system [of the Old Covenant], the gifts and sacrifices can't really get to the heart of the matter, can't assuage the conscience of the people, but are limited to matters of ritual and behaviour. It's essentially a temporary arrangement until a complete overhaul could be made.*<sup>Heb.9:9-10</sup> *The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... He cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect. For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.*<sup>Heb.10:1-10</sup> The **Old Covenant was a Covenant of Atonement** that only covered up peoples' sin (atonement means “covering”) and left them feeling guilty but the **New Covenant is a Covenant of Forgiveness** that removes our sins: *Look! This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*<sup>Jn.1:29</sup> *This is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.*<sup>Matt.26:28</sup>



Now that our sins are removed, there is no barrier between us and God **so we have fellowship with God:** *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.*<sup>1Jn.3:24</sup> *So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning. If you do, you will remain in fellowship with the Son and with the Father. And in this fellowship we enjoy the eternal life he promised us.*<sup>1Jn.2:14-15</sup> *And now we live in fellowship with the true God because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God, and he is eternal life.*<sup>1Jn.5:20</sup> The word “fellowship” is sometimes translated “partnership” (Titus, *he is my partner and co-worker among you,*<sup>2Cor.8:23</sup> *I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel;*<sup>Phil.1:4-5</sup>) or “participation” (Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?<sup>1Cor.10:16</sup>). Fellowship literally means *communion* (common-union) or *sharing* and we now have a **common union with God and His people—**  
**God the Father:** *And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*<sup>1Jn.1:3</sup> **God the Son:** *God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*<sup>1Cor.1:9</sup> **God the Holy Spirit:** *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*<sup>2Cor.13:14</sup> **God's people:** *We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard [about Jesus] so that you may have fellowship with us.*<sup>1Jn.1:3</sup>

Fasting in the OT was always connected with grief for sin and repenting: “Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish.<sup>Joel.2:12-13</sup> Jesus said that His Disciples cannot fast if He is with them. “How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?” Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.”<sup>Mk.2:18-20</sup> Jesus was not with His Disciples during the 3 days when He was in the grave and the 10 days from His Ascension to Pentecost, but ever since Pentecost when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, He is constantly with us. So as soon as we have the assurance that our sins are forgiven and the Bridegroom (Jesus) is with us, there should be no reason to “fast” and grieve over our sins because they are gone! *He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.*<sup>Ps.103:12</sup> Luther said: *Remorse before Calvary is of God; remorse after you have been to Calvary is of the devil. Repent of your sin, yes; but do not make your sin a subject for long and melancholy meditation. Why should I cheat God by spending my time and energy on remorse? I am greater than my sins.* Talk is cheap and anyone can claim to know God but if our actions do not agree with our affirmations we are deceived: *God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*<sup>1Jn.1:5-7</sup> *So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning. If you do, you will remain in fellowship with the Son and with the Father. And in this fellowship we enjoy the eternal life he promised us. I am writing these things to warn you about those who want to lead you astray. But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true—it is not a lie. So just as he has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ. And now, dear children, remain in fellowship with Christ so that when he returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from him in shame.*<sup>1Jn.2:24-28</sup>

Yes, our sins are forgiven and removed—now our work is to tell this Good News: **I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.**<sup>Mk.2:10</sup>

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Ps.134. Mark 3**

**That they might be with him and he would send them out to preach.**<sup>Mk.3:14</sup>



**The primary reason for ministry is fellowship** (being with Jesus). Everything that we do for God—including the ministry of preaching, evangelism, teaching, praying, etc.—is secondary to **fellowship with God** and this is summarised in the “*greatest commandment*”: *Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.*<sup>Mat.22:36</sup> Other ministries will follow, but if we aren’t in fellowship with God, everything that we do will miss God’s standard for our lives—which is sin—and what we do will not have that touch of glory, that touch of eternity,<sup>Rom.3:23</sup> that marks us out from the world.

Last week we saw that our **greatest concern** should be to have our sins forgiven—that was what John the Baptist preached and what Jesus preached. But our **greatest calling** is to be with Jesus, because until we have been with Him we will never really know God and so we will never represent Him with any authority. There is a progression in our relationship with God that equips us to minister for Him with authority: *Jesus went up on a mountainside and **called to him** those he wanted, and they **came to him**. He appointed twelve that they might **be with him** and that he might **send them out to preach** and to **have authority** to drive out demons.*<sup>Mk.3:13-15</sup>

**Firstly, we are called to Him:** Jesus still calls today—firstly we are called to **repentance**: *It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*<sup>Lk.5:31-32</sup> But Jesus also calls us to **follow Him** and unless we hear His voice we will not follow Him or fellowship with Him: *My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never die. No one can steal them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than anyone. No one can steal them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*<sup>Jn.10:27-30</sup>

**Then we must come to Him:** God’s call to conversion demands a response and our response of coming to God shows that He really did call us: *It is clear to us, friends, that God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions. You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated the Master. Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit!—taking the trouble with the joy, the joy with the trouble.*<sup>1Thess.1:4-6</sup> Our coming to Him indicates that we have dedicated our life to God and His Kingdom (God’s Kingdom is the rule of Christ in people’s hearts): *You became a model to all the believers—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*<sup>1Thess.1:8-10</sup> When God calls His people, they come: *He lifts up a banner for the distant nations, he whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly and speedily! Not one of them grows tired or stumbles, not one slumbers or sleeps; not a belt is loosened at the waist, not a sandal strap is broken... their horses' hooves seem like flint.*<sup>Is.5:26-28</sup> We can have the confidence to continue—and to finish—regardless of our circumstances because what God starts, He completes.<sup>Phil.1:6</sup>

**We must also be with Him:** Fellowship is being with God—not just knowing that God is with us but having that common-union (communion) with God: With God the Father: *And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*<sup>1Jn.1:3</sup> With God the Son: *God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*<sup>1Cor.1:9</sup> With God the Holy Spirit: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*<sup>2Cor.13:14</sup> And also with God’s people: *We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard [about Jesus] so that you may have fellowship with us.*<sup>1Jn.1:3</sup> Being with Jesus requires living by His values, respecting Him as an ever-present Friend, interacting with Him throughout each day and involving Him in our conversations and decisions. This is much more than just remembering Jesus on Sunday morning when we come together as Church—this is a union like a marriage where we know each other intimately.

**Then Jesus will send us out to preach:** Jesus sends all Believers out to preach—that is, proclaiming by personal witnessing: *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, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*<sup>1Matt.28:18-20</sup> We are all to proclaim the truth about Jesus—to be His witnesses: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem. You will be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria. And you will be my witnesses from one end of the earth to the other.*<sup>Acts.1:8</sup> Although personal witnessing is distinct from public preaching, the message is still the same—it is: *"Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and His love."* Public preaching is an expansion of witnessing but is primarily aimed at Believers and should have clarity and substance. However, both personal witnessing and public preaching is an *"exhortation"*<sup>Lk.3:18</sup> that should encourage people to trust God (even if it comes with stern warnings). Both personal witnessing and public preaching should be based on Scripture—personal witnessing must harmonise with Scripture and public preaching must expound Scripture: *All of those Levites read parts of the Scroll of the Law of God to the people. They made it clear to them. They told them what it meant. So the people were able to understand what was being read. Then Nehemiah and Ezra spoke up. So did the Levites who were teaching the people. All of those men said to the people, "This day is set apart to honour the LORD your God. So don't sob. Don't be sad." All of the people had been sobbing as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah was governor. Ezra was a priest and a teacher of the law. Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy some good food and sweet drinks. Send some of it to those who don't have any. This day is set apart to honour our Lord. So don't be sad. The joy of the LORD makes you strong." The Levites calmed all of the people down. They said, "Be quiet. This is a sacred day. So don't be sad." Then all of the people went away to eat and drink. They shared their food with others. They celebrated with great joy. Now they understood the words they had heard. That's because everything had been explained to them.*<sup>Neh.8:8-12</sup> *But I want you to continue to follow what you have learned. Don't give up what you are sure of. You know the people you learned it from. You have known the Holy Scriptures ever since you were a little child. They are able to teach you how to be saved by believing in Christ Jesus. God has breathed life into all of Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, a man of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing.*<sup>2Tim.3:14-17</sup> *Preach the word. Be ready to serve God in good times and bad. Correct people's mistakes. Warn them. Cheer them up with words of hope. Be very patient as you do these things. Teach them carefully. The time will come when people won't put up with true teaching. Instead, they will try to satisfy their own longings. They will gather a large number of teachers around them. The teachers will say what the people want to hear. The people will turn their ears away from the truth. They will turn to stories that aren't completely true. But I want you to keep your head no matter what happens. Don't give up when times are hard. Work to spread the good news. Do everything God has given you to do.*<sup>2Tim.4:2-5</sup> *The elders of the Jews continued to build the temple. They enjoyed great success because of the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.*<sup>Ezra.6:14</sup>

**Jesus then gives us authority:** When we are sent by Jesus, our personal witnessing and public preaching carries authority—if we stay in faith and fellowship: *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—just as I have received authority from my Father.*<sup>Rev.2:26-27</sup> *Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*<sup>1Jn.5:4-5</sup> However, our authority is quite different from the world's idea of authority: *The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on*

*thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*<sup>Lk.22:25-30</sup> We have authority to correct but not to dominate:  
*You have the authority to correct them when necessary, so don't let anyone disregard what you say.*<sup>Tit.2:14-15</sup> *Not  
that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.*<sup>2Cor.1:24</sup>  
As we progress in our relationship with God, from being **called**, to **coming** to Him and **being  
with** Him, He sends us out to **proclaim** with **authority**. So let's stay in fellowship with God,  
His Word and His people so that we will live up to our name of **Christ**-ians!



## February

I will thank the LORD at all times. My lips will always praise Him. Ps.34:1

### Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2018. Ps.34.

#### The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth!

The basic principle of bringing up children (and animals!) is to *say what you mean and mean what you say!* In Court, the principle is expanded further to: *“I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”* If that person does not tell the whole truth there is a penalty and they can be imprisoned for committing perjury. Jesus said that we should not need to swear an oath at all because our words should be sufficient. *Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned.*<sup>Jas.5:12</sup> *Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfil to the Lord the vows you have made.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*<sup>Matt.5:33-37</sup> Another Version puts it this way: *And don't say anything you don't mean. This counsel is embedded deep in our traditions. You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk, saying, ‘I’ll pray for you,’ and never doing it, or saying, ‘God be with you,’ and not meaning it. You don't make your words true by embellishing them with religious lace. In making your speech sound more religious, it becomes less true. Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.* Actually, the Courts provide an “affirmation” as an alternative to *swearing an oath*: *“I do solemnly and sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”*)

Although truth is absolute, life is seen through our own experience and view point and so we can sometimes put our own interpretation on the truth. The media is renowned for putting their own interpretation on truth and so we usually hear someone’s view about the news instead of hearing the actual news itself. This is especially common on moral issues when they try to bring their “balance” by giving a counter-view that then distorts the real truth. Our politicians often appear to give information that is favourable to their own political persuasion (especially over Brexit!!) which can then confuse the issues. But we should pray for our leaders (including those in the media) so we can live peaceful lives: *Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Saviour God wants us to live.*<sup>1Tim.2:1-3</sup> Governments are established by God to protect and care for their citizens, and generally we should obey our Government: *You must obey the authorities. Then you will not be punished. You must also obey them because you know it is right. That's also why you pay taxes. The authorities serve God. Ruling takes up all their time. Give to everyone what you owe. Do you owe taxes? Then pay them. Do you owe anything else to the government? Then pay it. Do you owe respect? Then give it. Do you owe honour? Then show it.*<sup>Rom.13:5-7</sup> However, if our Government does not protect and care for us we should use the available legal methods to get justice: *But Paul replied, “No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty of harming the Jews. If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!”*<sup>Acts.25:10-11</sup>

When natural justice does not prevail and there is a conflict of conscience—either moral or spiritual—like Peter, *we must obey God rather than any human authority.*<sup>Acts.5:29</sup> But sometimes there is a moral right and expediency for civil disobedience. On 23 August 1989, there was a peaceful political demonstration called “*The Baltic Way*”. Approximately two million people joined their hands to form a human chain spanning 420 miles across the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to protest at, and secede from, the Soviet Union. A more recent mass

demonstration occurred in 2009 after the Icelandic Banking collapse, when thousands of people protested on the square in front of the Parliament in Reykjavík. This inspired the Spanish artist Santiago Sierra to create the “*Black Cone*” monument (named after the hats that condemned people in Spanish Inquisition had to wear). The sculpture is marked with a plaque bearing a quote from the French Revolution’s Declaration Of The Rights Of Man And Of The Citizen (1793): *When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people and for each portion of the people the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.*

But ethics are rarely straight forward and sometimes we find ourselves in a dilemma about how much “*truth*” we should say, especially when we are dealing with silly or unjust “man-made” laws or when God’s Kingdom maybe detrimentally affected. Richard Wumbrand, a Romanian Pastor who spent a total of fourteen years in Communist prisons for being a Christian, faced this dilemma. He wrote: *We must distinguish between the appearance and the substance, between what people call facts" or "truth" and their spiritual significance. Who can work as a conspirator in the Underground church and always speak what is generally called "truth"? When I introduced myself, I did it under a cover-name. The one with whom I was speaking might be an informer. If asked by someone where I was yesterday, a factually correct answer might bring many people into great trouble. Today again the interrogator told me: "You are a Christian, and a pastor. Your religion obliges you to tell us the whole truth." I had my own thoughts about this. If I had complied with his demands, other brethren would have been arrested. Nobody can be a leader in the Underground church without re-evaluating the notion of truth.*

Rahab was commended for her faith when she welcomed the two spies: *By an act of faith, Rahab, the Jericho harlot, welcomed the spies and escaped the destruction that came on those who refused to trust God.*<sup>Heb.11:31</sup> But Rahab lied about hiding the spies: *So the king sent a message to Rahab. It said, “Bring out the men who came into your house. They’ve come to check out the whole land.” But the woman had hidden the two men. She said, “It’s true that the men came here. But I didn’t know where they had come from. They left at sunset, when it was time to close the city gate. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You might catch up with them.” But in fact she had taken them up on the roof. There she had hidden them under some flax she had piled up.*<sup>Josh.2:3-6</sup> Rahab was ambiguous about telling the whole truth to Israel’s enemies because she believed that there was a greater principal at stake—obedience to God God’s kingdom: where faith and works go hand-in-hand. *The same with Rahab, the Jericho harlot. Wasn’t her action in hiding God’s spies and helping them escape—that seamless unity of believing and doing—what counted with God? The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse.*<sup>Jas.2:25-26</sup> But Rahab was careful to tell the truth about God: *The LORD your God is the God who rules over heaven above and earth below.*<sup>Josh.2:11</sup>

Real “*truth*” is only found in Jesus, who said: *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.*<sup>Jn.14:6</sup> Pilate did not understand truth because he did not understand Jesus: *Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Is that your own idea?” Jesus asked. “Or did others talk to you about me?” “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus said, “My kingdom is not part of this world. If it were, those who serve me would fight. They would try to keep the Jews from arresting me. My kingdom is from another place.” “So you are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right to say I am a king. In fact, that’s the reason I was born. I came into the world to give witness to the truth. Everyone who is on the side of truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” Pilate asked.*<sup>Jn.18:33-38</sup>

Let us never be ambiguous when talking **about Jesus** or His claims and to be careful to only say *the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth* about Him. Then we will bring joy to God and to our Christian brothers and sisters. *It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*<sup>3Jn.1:3-4</sup> *Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD? Who may enter your*

presence on your holy hill? Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts. Those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbours or speak evil of their friends.<sup>Ps.15:1-3</sup>

## Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2018. Ps.135:1-7. Mark 4

**Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.**<sup>Mk.4:9</sup>

Physically deaf people feel very isolated because although they can see others they cannot hear what is going on around them—especially conversations—so to be deaf and blind must be the worst of all disabilities Helen Keller (1880 – 1968) was born with the ability to see and hear. At 19 months old, she contracted an unknown illness and lost her hearing and sight but overcame these disabilities and became the first deaf-blind person to earn a bachelor of arts degree. She learned to read and write in Braille and to use the hand signals of the deaf-mute—which she could understand only by touch. Determined to communicate with others as conventionally as possible, Keller learned to speak, and gave speeches and lectures on aspects of her life. She learned to "hear" people's speech by reading their lips with her hands due to her heightened her sense. But Keller recognised that there were greater disabilities than her physical ones. She said: *"The only thing that's worse than being blind, is having sight but no vision"*.

Jesus was continually confronted by a religious culture where people thought that they knew about God. They studied the Scriptures meticulously to find all the obscure rules and regulations, but in reality, they knew nothing about God and only saw Jesus as a human being rather than who He really was—the Son of God. *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.*<sup>Jn.5:37-40</sup>

Although Jesus healed blind people, His main ministry was to open people's spiritual eyes, which did primarily through His preaching: *"For he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favour has come."* He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. *All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"*<sup>Lk.4:18-21</sup> So when the religious leaders rejected Jesus and His teaching, they were confirming their spiritual deafness and blindness. *Jesus then said, "I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretence of seeing will be exposed as blind."* Some Pharisees overheard him and said, *"Does that mean you're calling us blind?"* Jesus said, *"If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."*<sup>Jn.9:39-41</sup> Their spiritual deafness and blindness had been predicted by Isaiah: *You've been given insight into God's kingdom—you know how it works. But to those who can't see it yet, everything comes in stories, creating readiness, nudging them toward receptive insight. These are people: 'Whose eyes are open but don't see a thing, Whose ears are open but don't understand a word, Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven.'* Do you see how this story works? *All my stories work this way.*<sup>Mk.4:11-13</sup>

But spiritual deafness and blindness is not restricted to the religious leaders of Jesus' day—it is still the major disability of today and is much more debilitating than physical deafness and blindness. Until people are "born-again" by the Holy Spirit, they remain spiritually deaf and spiritually blind: *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.*<sup>1Cor.2:14</sup> The world's greatest need is to be "born-again" because that is the only way to see God and His kingdom: *Jesus replied, "What I'm about to tell you is true. No one can see God's kingdom without being born again... No one can enter God's kingdom without being born through*



water and the Holy Spirit. People give birth to people. But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised when I say, 'You must all be born again.'<sup>Jn.3:3-7</sup> New-birth is the only way to have our sins forgiven, peace with God, and eternal life: *You have been born again by means of the living word of God. His word lasts forever. You were not born again from a seed that will die. You were born from a seed that can't die.*<sup>1Pet.1:23</sup> God chose to give us new birth through the message of truth. He wanted us to be the first and best of everything he created.<sup>Jas.1:18</sup> Even though we must personally respond to God in order to accept His gracious gift of eternal life, knowing God is not an academic ability but a revelation from God Himself: *You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.*<sup>Matt.16:17</sup> Revelation literally means "an unveiling," as in the removal of a blindfold. When God removes the spiritual blindfold of our inherited natural life, we are able to understand spiritual matters. *To this very day, the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. The veil has not been removed. Only faith in Christ can take it away. To this very day, when the Law of Moses is read, a veil covers the minds of those who hear it. But when anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Holy Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, freedom is also there.*<sup>2Cor.3:14-17</sup> God dispels our darkness by shining His light in our hearts. *For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.*<sup>2Cor.4:6-7</sup> But after we have received our new spiritual birth, we still have to rely on God.

We learn to rely on God by knowing Him better and this comes from meditating (reflecting) on God—especially from the only true and accurate account of Him in the Scriptures: *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*<sup>2Tim.2:7</sup> Christian meditation is not a contemplative practice that aims at getting beyond words and rational thought into pure awareness of oneness with God. Rather, Christian meditation is filling the mind with Scripture and then loading the heart with them, until not only the emotions but the entire life is affected by them. It is what the "selah" in the Psalms means. ("Selah" can be paraphrased as: *sit down and have a cup of tea as you think about what you have just read!*) **Christian meditation** entails firstly to **think out your theology** (i.e. having it clearly in your mind—to know what you believe). Secondly it means to **work in your theology** (i.e. self-communion, talking to yourself—for example, "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" It is asking, "How would I be different if I took this theological truth seriously? How would it change my attitudes and actions if I really believed this from the bottom of my heart?"). Thirdly it means to **pray up your theology** (i.e. turning your theology into prayer, letting it trigger adoration, confession, and supplication). As we do these things, our theology will intersect with our experience and give us the confidence to trust God in each and every situation—**that is spiritual maturity!**

**We have a responsibility** to ensure that **we hear** God's Word in our heart, that **we understand** God's Word in our heart, that **we believe** God's Word in our heart, that **we protect** God's Word in our heart, and that **we apply** God's Word from our heart. *But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as*

*much as had been planted!*<sup>Mat.13:16-23</sup> If we don't hear, understand, believe, and protect God's Word in our heart and if we fail to apply God's Word from our heart, we will dishonour God and stay immature because we are not bearing fruit (have no strong spiritual character). But if we bless others (especially with the encouragement to trust God), we will reap an even larger harvest: *The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller. The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.*<sup>Prov.11:24-25</sup>

That is the purpose of the ministry gifts to the Church—to enable the Church to come to full maturity and stand firm in their own faith: *Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.*<sup>Eph.4:11-15</sup>

**Yes! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.**<sup>Mk.4:9</sup>

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018. Ps.136:1-9. Mark 5**

**What about the poor pigs?**

*The herd of about two thousand pigs rushed down the cliff into the sea and drowned.*<sup>Mk.5:13</sup>

God's plan for mankind is that no-one would perish but that all may have peace with God and live with Him forever: *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.*<sup>Jn.3:16</sup> *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*<sup>2Pet.3:9</sup>

The Bible is not a scientific textbook, nor is it an account of the world's history or even a script on ethics (although it contains all of these)—the Bible is a written record of God's plan of salvation for mankind through Jesus Christ. John said that *these miracles have been written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and so that you will have life by believing in him.*<sup>Jn.20:31</sup> *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.*<sup>1Jn.5:13</sup> Luke said that: *I also have decided to write a careful account for you... so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.*<sup>Lk.1:3-4</sup> Paul said: *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.*<sup>Rom.15:4</sup> *Those things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who are living at the time when God's work is being completed. So be careful. When you think you are standing firm, you might fall.*<sup>1Cor.10:11-12</sup>

God created the universe—and everything in it—by His Word (we are not told how, only that he said: *let there be—and there was.*<sup>Gen.1</sup>) and God sustains the universe by His Word. *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*<sup>Heb.1:3</sup> *For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*<sup>Col.1:16-17</sup> God has set in motion laws (such as the orbits of the planets, the seasons of the year, gravity, etc.) to keep everything in order without the need to intervene: *God said, "Let there be lights in the huge space of the sky. Let them separate the day from the night. Let them serve as signs to mark off the seasons and the days and the years."*<sup>Gen.1:14</sup> God has also established the reproduction cycle of plants to happen naturally without any interference: *The land produced plants. Each kind of plant had its own kind of seeds. The land produced trees that bore fruit with seeds in it. Each kind of tree had its own kind of seeds. God saw that it was good.*<sup>Gen.1:12</sup> But, although God is ultimately in control of everything, He does not micro-manage this world. God has given the

day-to-day management of this world to mankind, including taking responsibility for the natural resources of the physical world and also for taking responsibility the social wellbeing of humanity: *God blessed them. He said to them, "Have children and increase your numbers. Fill the earth and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the waters and the birds of the air. Rule over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I am giving you every plant on the face of the whole earth that bears its own seeds. I am giving you every tree that has fruit with seeds in it. All of them will be given to you for food. "I am giving every green plant to all of the land animals and the birds of the air for food. I am also giving the plants to all of the creatures that move on the ground. I am giving them to every living thing that breathes." And that's exactly what happened. God saw everything he had made. And it was very good.*<sup>Gen.1:28-31</sup>

When God authorised man to take responsibility for the earth, it was a blessing and God said it was very good. He thus affirmed man's responsibility to sustainably farm the land and to use (not abuse) creation for the benefit of humanity—for man's health, comfort, appreciation, enjoyment and recreation. *Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labour, for these are gifts from God.*<sup>Ecd.3:11-13</sup> *God did not spare his own Son. He gave him up for us all. Then won't he also freely give us everything else?*<sup>Rom.8:32</sup>

Now that man is responsible for the day-to-day running of the world, we cannot blame God when things go wrong or when difficulties or tragedies happen (see Rudyard Kipling's *Natural Theology* below). God doesn't make things go wrong because that is not within His character. Yes, God is **Sovereign** (He can do anything He wants to do): *Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.*<sup>Jer.32:17</sup> *I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.*<sup>Job.42:2</sup> God is also **Self-existent**—the "**I am who I am.**"<sup>Ex.3:14</sup> **Omnipresent** (all present), *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*<sup>Ps.139:7-8</sup> **Omniscient** (all knowing) LORD, *you know me and see me. You test my thoughts about you.*<sup>Jer.12:3</sup> *Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.*<sup>Jn.16:30</sup> **Omnipotent** (all powerful) *I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?*<sup>Jer.32:27</sup> But God can only do what His nature or character allows—and God is **Omnibenevolent** (perfectly good and all love): *You are good, and what you do is good.*<sup>Ps.119:68</sup> So, when evil or temptation comes, it is not God who brought it: *When you are tempted, you shouldn't say, "God is tempting me." God can't be tempted by evil. And he doesn't tempt anyone. But your own evil longings tempt you. They lead you on and drag you away. When they are allowed to grow, they give birth to sin. When sin has grown up, it gives birth to death. My dear brothers and sisters, don't let anyone fool you. Every good and perfect gift is from God.*<sup>Jas.1:13-16</sup>

Sin and evil originally came from the devil but after Adam sinned, sin and evil became part of our nature and dwells within our hearts. *Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?"*<sup>Matt.8:4</sup> *He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."*<sup>Mk.7:20-23</sup> *an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*<sup>Lk.6:45</sup> That's why God gives us a new heart when we are born-again. *I will give you new hearts. I will give you a new spirit that is faithful to me. I will remove your stubborn hearts from you. I will give you hearts that obey me. I will put my Spirit in you. I will move you to follow my rules.*<sup>Ezek.36:26-27</sup> If we resist temptations when they come (including the temptation to blame God), we will grow strong in our faith and be able to resist the next temptation that comes our way: *My brothers and sisters, you will face all kinds of trouble. When you do, think of it as pure joy. Your faith will be put to the test. You know that when that happens it will produce in you the strength to continue. The strength to keep going must be allowed*



to finish its work. Then you will be all you should be. You will have everything you need.<sup>Jas.1:2-4</sup> God's thoughts towards us are precious and kind: *Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God!*<sup>Psa.139:16-17</sup> That is why we can ask God to keep us from sinning when we are tempted: *Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted. Save us from the evil one.*<sup>Matt.6:13</sup> We can also ask God to intervene when we need help—this is part of prayer. *The widow who really needs help and is left all alone puts her hope in God. Night and day she keeps on praying. Night and day she asks God for help.*<sup>1Tim5:5</sup>

**So what about the poor pigs who drowned?** Unlike us humans, when animals they die, they are no more—and there is no judgement for them to face. Both humans and animals have a soul (which is made up of the mind, emotion, personality and will)—but an animal's soul is just an animal soul, with no God-conscious spirit. Animals are not made in God's image and so they will not have to give an account for their behaviour to their Creator—whereas, every one of us has *sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*<sup>Rom.3:23</sup> Every one of us will die and then face the consequences: *And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.*<sup>Heb.9:27-28</sup> Sadly, some people behave like animals and only follow their natural (as opposed to their spiritual) instincts: *Like unthinking animals, they do whatever their instincts tell them, and so they bring about their own destruction.*<sup>Jude.1:10</sup> (Which is not surprising—if you believe you came from an animal, why not behave like one!) But we are more than “*animal*”—we are created in God's image with an eternal spirit which will return to its Maker. Recently Dairy farmers have been accused of ‘rape, murder and slavery’, attacked on social media and even subject to death threats. Worryingly many of the voices campaigning against dairy farming, although not those making the most extreme claims, are registered charities. It is, apparently, a charitable activity to campaign to destroy the livelihood of family farms and as a logical consequence remove the necessity for dairy cows to even exist. Underlying this activity are a strange and hugely illogical set of beliefs ostensibly related to animal welfare but are actually driven by anger and misanthropy (hatred of mankind). And it is linked to anthropomorphism (the attribution of human motivation, characteristics, or behaviour to animals and inanimate objects).  
Next time you eat a bacon-buttie or a pork pie remember the pig that died (and the 2,000 pigs that drowned)—that was the end of their life and they faced no judgment! **But when we die, we will each have to give an account to God** for how we have lived and how we have ruled God's domain. **So, if you have not yet received God forgiveness, ask now because tomorrow may be too late!!**

### Natural Theology Primitive

I ate my fill of a whale that died  
And stranded after a month at sea—  
There is a pain in my inside. Why have the gods afflicted me?  
Ow! I am purged till I am a wraith! Wow! I am sick till I cannot see!  
What is the sense of Religion and Faith: Look how the gods have afflicted me!  
*We had a kettle: we let it leak: Our not repairing it made it worse.  
We haven't had any tea for a week—The bottom is out of the Universe!*

### Pagan

How can the skin of rat or mouse hold  
Anything more than a harmless flea?  
The burning plague has taken my household. Why have my gods afflicted me?  
All my kith and kin are deceased,  
Though they were as good as good could be,

I will out and batter the family priest, Because my gods have afflicted me!

### Medieval

My privy and well drain into each other After the custom of Christendie—  
Fevers and fluxes are wasting my mother. Why has the Lord afflicted me?  
The Saints are helpless for all I offer—So are the clergy I used to fee.  
Henceforward I keep my cash in my coffer, Because the Lord has afflicted me.

### Material

I run eight hundred hens to the acre They die by dozens mysteriously—  
I am more than doubtful concerning my Maker, Why has the Lord afflicted me?  
What a return for all my endeavour—Not to mention the *L.S.D!*  
I am an atheist now and for ever, Because this God has afflicted me!

### Progressive

Money spent on an Army or Fleet Is homicidal lunacy—  
My son has been killed in the Mons retreat, Why is the Lord afflicting me?  
Why are murder, pillage and arson And rape allowed by the Deity?  
I will write to the Times, deriding our Parson Because my god has afflicted me.

### Conclusion

This was none of the good Lord's pleasure, For the spirit He breathed in Man is free;  
But what comes after is measure for measure, And not a God that afflicteth thee.  
As was the sowing so the reaping Is now and evermore shall be.  
Thou art delivered to thine own keeping. Only thyself hath afflicted thee!

Rudyard Kipling

N.B. *wraith* = ghost, spirit. *privy and well drain into each other* = latrine or toilet contaminates the water supply. *Christendie* = a poetic version of 'Christendom'. *L.S.D.* = Pounds, Shillings and Pence (the old currency of the UK).

### Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2018. Ps.138. Mark 6:1-29

**What sort of wisdom do you have?** *I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten. No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began.*<sup>1Cor.2:6-7</sup>

Just twenty 20 years ago any credible research required much research, reading lots of books and many visits to libraries. But today we have all the information readily available at our finger tips—quite literally, when we click a mouse! However, information is not the same as education—and knowledge is not the same as wisdom. We are living in an age where we expect the “*professionals*” and the “*experts*” to make our decisions for us and then we blame them if something goes wrong! (That is why our *NHS has set aside almost half of its entire budget to cover compensation payments and legal costs,*<sup>Express, Dec.2016</sup> and our A&E Departments are inundated with people who would never have thought of going to Hospital for check-up 20 years ago!) We are living in a world that treasures *amusement* rather than *musement* (*to muse* means *contemplation, thoughtful reflective thinking*). Amusement humours us and can take our minds away from our troubles but it can also mislead us into believing that life should be calm and peaceful all the time. In today's *digital world* (the multi-media world of TV, film and especially computer-

generated games), we are invited to take a front row seat, not just in front of our screen, but in the Director's Seat of the 'Stage of Life'. The distinction between the digital world and the world of reality has become blurred and, because the digital world is so vastly different from reality, it can sometimes be very difficult to adjust back into the real world. In the digital world **we** are in control, but in the world of reality we are **not** in control of our circumstances. In the digital world, we are presented with alternatives to our present experience and a 'Drop Down Menu' provides us with alternate or optional browsing experiences. But in the world of reality, the power to change our present experience doesn't always exist—the world of reality doesn't offer us a 'delete button' for the negative experiences we go through! Paul had to learn this lesson: *Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*<sup>2Cor.12:8-9</sup> The digital world encourages us to live in an imaginary world, but actually we live in a real world with real pain and where our actions have real consequences. In the digital world we can airbrush away wrinkles but in the real world, bad things happen to good people and we have to face up to reality and accept it. **We are not** sitting in the Director's Chair of life—**God is! We are not** the central character in the story of life—**God is! We are not** the hero of either our life or the story unfolding around us—**God is! We are not** always going to get what we want, when we want. **We are not** going to be pain-free and occupied all of the time. But we should not think of hardship or suffering as all bad (even though it may be painful), because through them we can learn obedience and develop character—just as Jesus did: *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.*<sup>Heb.2:10</sup> It is through hardship and suffering that we become stable, reliable and resilient: *My brothers and sisters, be very happy when you are tested in different ways. You know that such testing of your faith produces endurance. Endure until your testing is over. Then you will be mature and complete, and you won't need anything.*<sup>Jas.1:2-4</sup> Unless we understand that our hardship and suffering can develop maturity in us, we will want to give up rather than persevere and we will miss out on the joy that we can have during our troubles: *As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*<sup>Jas.5:11</sup> *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*<sup>Jn.16:33</sup> *You have joy even though you may have had to suffer for a little while. You may have had to suffer sadness in all kinds of trouble.*<sup>1Pet.1:6</sup> But for the Christian, hardship doesn't only develop maturity in our character—hardship also proves that our faith is real (which then brings praise and honour to God): *Your troubles have come in order to prove that your faith is real. It is worth more than gold. Gold can pass away even though fire has made it pure. Your faith is meant to bring praise, honour and glory to God.*<sup>1Pet.1:7</sup> So, instead of seeing hardship as a hindrance, we should see hardship as a help—as a way that God can help us develop our character (that is, our soul—which includes our mind, emotion, personality and will). *We are full of joy even when we suffer. We know that our suffering gives us the strength to go on. The strength to go on produces character. Character produces hope. And hope will never let us down.*<sup>Rom.5:3-5</sup> *Put up with hard times. God uses them to train you. He is treating you as children. What children are not trained by their parents? God trains all of his children... Our parents trained us for a little while. They did what they thought was best. But God trains us for our good. He wants us to share in his holiness. No training seems pleasant at the time. In fact, it seems painful. But later on it produces a harvest of godliness and peace. It does that for those who have been trained by it.*<sup>Heb.12:7-11</sup>

Just reading the Bible (or even studying the Bible), will not make anyone a Christian, because for anyone to become a Christian they must come to Jesus and receive life from Him: *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.<sup>Jn.5:37-40</sup> In the same way, just knowing that hardship can develop our character will not actually develop a godly character in us—we need to apply that knowledge and yield to God's discipline (wisdom is applied knowledge). *The LORD gives wisdom. Knowledge and understanding come from his mouth.*<sup>Pron.2:6</sup> *Because of what God has done, you belong to Christ Jesus. He has become God's wisdom for us. He makes us right with God. He makes us holy and sets us free.*<sup>1Cor.1:30</sup> Followers of Christ—Christians—are citizens of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God is the real “*real world*”—the world of true reality, not a fictitious world of fantasy. The Kingdom of God is where Jesus Christ is acknowledged as Lord. The same Jesus Christ has sent us Christians out into the whole world (including the digital world) as His Ambassadors—not to become overcome by the world, but to be a light in the world and to the world. We can only be properly equipped as Ambassadors when we follow God's instructions and muse (ponder, think, and contemplate) His Wisdom, especially when it is personified in Jesus: *Get wisdom. Get understanding. Don't forget my words. Don't turn away from them. Stay close to wisdom, and she will keep you safe. Love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is best. So get wisdom. No matter what it costs, get understanding. Value wisdom, and she will lift you up. Hold her close, and she will honour you. She will set a beautiful crown on your head. She will give you a glorious crown.*<sup>Pron.4:5-9</sup> When Jesus spoke, people were amazed at His wisdom: *The next Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. They asked, "Where did he get all this wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?" Then they scoffed, "He's just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us." They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him.*<sup>Mk.6:2-3</sup> Jesus' wisdom was not inherited from heaven but learned from being obedient to God and also to His human parents: *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.*<sup>Phil.2:6-8</sup> *Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart. Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and all the people.*<sup>Lk.2:51-52</sup>

Eve wanted wisdom but found that disobedience led to death: *The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her.*<sup>Gen.3:6</sup>

**True wisdom comes from God and obeying His instructions.** *For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict... By standing firm you will gain life.*<sup>Lk.21:15-19</sup> *Look, I now teach you these decrees and regulations just as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy. Obey them completely, and you will display your wisdom and intelligence among the surrounding nations. When they hear all these decrees, they will exclaim, 'How wise and prudent are the people of this great nation!' For what great nation has a god as near to them as the LORD our God is near to us whenever we call on him? And what great nation has decrees and regulations as righteous and fair as this body of instructions that I am giving you today?*<sup>Deut.4:5-8</sup> **So let's follow God's instructions:** *So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*<sup>Rom.12:1-2</sup>

## March

I will honour the LORD. Let those who are hurting hear and be joyful. Ps.34:2

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Ps.139:1-14.

**March: I will honour the LORD. Let those who are hurting hear and be joyful.** <sup>Ps.34:1-2</sup>

**Prayer:** Prayer is probably the most important part of the Christians' duty and daily routine: *All the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God.*<sup>Acts.4:24</sup> *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*<sup>Eph.6:18</sup> *First, I want all of you to pray for everyone. Ask God to bless them. Give thanks for them. Pray for kings. Pray for all who are in authority. Pray that we will live peaceful and quiet lives. And pray that we will be godly and holy. That is good. It pleases God our Saviour.*<sup>1Tim.2:1-3</sup> True prayer can only be addressed to God the Father through Jesus Christ. To offer prayers to any other person or "god" is not only dishonouring to Jesus and His redemptive work but is blasphemy. *You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.*<sup>Ex.20:3-5</sup> Actually, the so-called other "gods" are not "deities" at all but a deception because there is only One God and One Lord: *So then, here is what I say about eating food that is offered to statues of gods. We know that a god made by human hands is really nothing at all in the world. We know there is only one God. There may be so-called gods either in heaven or on earth. In fact, there are many "gods" and many "lords." But for us there is only one God. He is the Father. All things came from him, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord. He is Jesus Christ. All things came because of him, and we live because of him.*<sup>1Cor.8:4-6</sup> *At one time you didn't know God. You were slaves to gods that are really not gods at all. But now you know God. Even better, God knows you. So why are you turning back to those weak and worthless beliefs? Do you want to be slaves to them all over again?*<sup>Gal.4:8-9</sup> *They have thrown the statues of the gods of those nations into the fire. And they have destroyed them. That's because they weren't really gods at all. They were nothing but statues that were made out of wood and stone. They were made by human hands.*<sup>Is.37:19</sup> *Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.)*<sup>Jer.2:11</sup>

Some people find prayer hard and this is usually because they make prayer into a ritual rather than a relationship with their heavenly Father. Greg Koukl gives some useful tips: *Prayer is harder when it is rambling. It is harder for the person praying, and it is harder for those listening when prayer is in a group. We lace our prayers with contrived Christian mumbo jumbo (some have called it "Christian psychobabble"). We insert useless words like "just" in virtually every phrase. Then we use the words "Lord," "Father," and "Jesus" as if they were punctuation marks. In short, we talk to God in ways we wouldn't think of talking when speaking with any other intelligent person. This habit is hard to break. I know from personal experience. But I have a solution that has helped me trim down the nonsense. I have instructed our staff at STR that when we meet for prayer, we pray according to the acronym **SIP: Specifically, Intelligibly, and Persuasively.***

When we pray to God our Father through Jesus, we must acknowledge that we only have access to the Father's attention and grace through the mediation and work of our Saviour, Jesus Christ—just using the words "in Jesus' name" is not sufficient. If we consciously or unconsciously expect God to hear our prayer because of our service or moral effort, we are praying in our own name. To pray *in Jesus' name*, then, is to be aware of the grace of the gospel as the basis of prayer, and to have our attitude in prayer deeply enriched—both humbled and exalted.

Whenever we pray publicly, we should ensure that others can hear and understand what is prayed: *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."*<sup>Jn.11:41-42</sup> *Suppose you are praising God with your spirit. And suppose there are visitors among you who don't understand what's going on. How can they say "Amen" when you give thanks? They don't know what you are saying. You might be giving thanks well enough. But the others are not being built up. I thank God that I speak in other languages*

more than all of you do. But in the church I would rather speak five words that people can understand than 10,000 words in another language.<sup>1Cor.14:16-19</sup> (“Amen” means “I agree; may it be so.”)

### **Sometimes we can feel inadequate at praying and wonder if they do any good**

*Wee Willie Winkie climbs the stairs; Wee Willie Winkie kneels to say his prayers:*

*Hands together, eyes closed, a bowing of his head, Mumbles words his mother taught him – tumbles into bed.*

*Wee Willie Winkie never fails to pray; Wee Willie Winkie knows just what to pray;*

*Wee Willie wonders what good the words have done, For he has never prayed a prayer with words that are his own!*

Gordon Bailey

But the Bible says that a **single prayer of one righteous person is powerful and effective:** *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*<sup>Jas.5:16</sup> Effective prayer is not dependant on how many words we use but whether we believe God when we pray—and especially about our daily needs: *And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*<sup>Matt.6:5-8</sup> The Disciples asked Jesus to instruct them on prayer: *Once Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he stopped praying, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.”*<sup>Lk.11:1</sup> This is what Jesus taught:

***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name:*** All prayer (personal and public) should start with honouring and reverencing God. In conversation we address each other by name, and so we should also address God by name when we pray. God is not some vague deity and neither is He “*the man upstairs*”—He is Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, and we should honour Him as God: *hallowed be your name (may your name be honoured or may your name be kept holy)*. But because we are now His children, we can address Him as “*our Father*”.

***Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven:*** Although there is no need to ask after God’s own personal welfare—He lacks nothing and is always “*well*”—we should ask after God’s plans and purposes. We want God’s kingdom to expand and His will to be done here as well is in heaven and should pray to for that too.

***Give us today our daily bread.*** Most of our personal prayers should be praise—honouring and exalting God—but we should also ask God for our daily needs and when we ask, we should have an attitude of gratefulness and trust: *Don't worry about anything. Instead, tell God about everything. Ask and pray. Give thanks to him. Then God's peace will watch over your hearts and your minds because you belong to Christ Jesus.*<sup>Phil.4:6-7</sup>

***And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*** God’s forgiveness of our sins is the core of God’s Kingdom, but our forgiveness of other people’s sins is also integral to God’s Kingdom. *Shouldn't you have had mercy on the other servant just as I had mercy on you?*<sup>Matt.18:33</sup> *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*<sup>Matt.6:14-15</sup>

***And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*** The NIV puts it this way: *Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted. Save us from the evil one.* Sin always has consequences and none of us really wants to sin, so we should ask God to keep us from failing and falling.

***For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*** We conclude a conversation with an exhortation or wish such as “*God bless you*” or “*see you soon*”. And we should also end our prayers with an exhortation such as this doxology (literally *a glorious word*).



**Remember, the first rule of prayer is to pray**—action always beats intention. Also, attachment to God is the goal—life in Him, not in a method. Prayer is a relationship not a ritual but it is better to develop a habit of prayer rather than leaving your convenience.

**So let's just do it—let's PRAY!**

**Here is an outline for Personal Prayer** adapted from Greg Koukl

**Start by quieting yourself and connect with God.** The impulse is to hurry, to run my request list and move on. But resist it. First, reach out to God—use the words, “*Father, hallowed be Your name.*” It’s a beginning, an embrace, an initiation of intimacy. The reason you should settle your body and your mind to focus on God—daily, ideally—is to attach to Him, to honour Him, to revere Him, to plead with Him (i.e. *appeal earnestly and leave the answer with God*), to devote yourself to Him. That is our need. You may not always succeed in connecting deeply, yet still we should first reach out to Him. That’s the beginning—*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (Jas.4:8)*. [Plead in prayer is not out of desperation but dependency: *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*<sup>2Cor.12:8-9</sup> Plead = παρακαλέω parakaleō; to aid, help, comfort, encourage. To call for or upon someone as for aid.]

**Next sing a hymn** with words that come from your heart, that express your hunger, desire, and love for God, or your dependence on Him, or that extol a Divine virtue. Often older music is more satisfying, **but alter the lyrics to sing to Him**, not about Him.

**Next, read aloud a short prayer** such as the *Valley of Vision* (a collection of short Puritan prayers) or use a good Hymn (many of Wesley’s hymns were written as holy poems and set to music later). Do this slowly, thoughtfully, intentionally, modifying the words where needed to match your own sentiments or theology.

**Start your supplication with “Your Kingdom come**, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” We want God to make changes, and the first place the Kingdom needs to descend is in your own life, and in your home with your own family. So ask that God’s Kingdom (Christ’s rule in your heart) will come for those who are yours— your family: **Holy Spirit, rise up within me and cause me to triumph every moment of today**. From there I move to the urgent, pressing needs of others, friends first, usually—or to more general concerns. Finally, pray for help with specific tasks ahead of you that day. *Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted. Save us from the evil one.*

**Finish by devoting yourself and your day to God**, closing with the short doxology at the end of the Lord’s prayer: “*For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*” or with David’s parting benediction in Ps. 19: “*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*”

That’s the basic pattern. You don’t need to do each thing every time you pray—you can leave steps out sometimes but this sequence will connect you to God, get you moving, and keep you on track. At times, though, abandon the plan entirely—some issues are so pressing the prayers should gush out spontaneously with feeling and intensity.

Remember, the first rule of prayer is to pray—action always beats intention. Attachment to God is the goal—our life is in Him, not in a method.

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Ps.139:12-24. Mk.5:21-43**

**Who touched me?**

Touch is probably the most important of our five senses because it is how we connect with others—and without touch, we feel isolated and alone. When people came to Jesus they wanted to touch Him and for Him to touch them, because they knew that if they connected with Jesus

they would be helped and made whole. He begged Jesus, "Please come. My little daughter is dying. Place your hands on her to heal her. Then she will live." So Jesus went with him.<sup>Mk.5:23-24</sup>

Under Jewish law, there were many regulations regarding keeping ceremoniously "clean" (or holy) and if you broke those rules or touched someone who was unclean, you automatically became unclean yourself and had to be isolated from the rest of the community. People with leprosy had to ring a bell and shout "unclean" so they didn't make others unclean. Although this had a practical purpose of isolating contagious diseases, its real significance was to illustrate that God is holy and so they too must be holy: *Set yourselves apart for me. Be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Obey my rules. Follow them. I am the LORD. I make you holy... You must be holy. You must be set apart to me. I am the LORD. I am holy. I have set you apart from the other nations to be my own people.*<sup>Lev.20:7-8;26</sup> But there was an exception—if anyone touched the Altar they became holy because the Altar was holy: *Anyone who touches those offerings will become holy.*<sup>Lev.6:18</sup> *The altar will be a very holy place. Anything that touches it will be holy.*<sup>Ex.29:37</sup> another translation puts it this way: *the Altar will become soaked in holiness—anyone who so much as touches the Altar will become holy.*

The Altar was the first object anyone passed when they entered the Temple courts and it was where the Priests killed and burnt the animals as sacrifices in order to atone for people's sin. This was an allegory and represented something much better—something that actually worked and dealt with people's conscience—it represented Jesus' death on the Cross where He became the final sacrifice that took away the sins of the world: *My dear children, I'm writing this to you so that you will not sin. But suppose someone does sin. Then we have one who speaks to the Father for us. He stands up for us. He is Jesus Christ, the Blameless One. He gave his life to pay for our sins. But he not only paid for our sins. He also paid for the sins of the whole world.*<sup>1Jn.2:1-2</sup> *He suffered the things we should have suffered. He took on himself the pain that should have been ours. But we thought God was punishing him. We thought God was wounding him and making him suffer. But the servant was pierced because we had sinned. He was crushed because we had done what was evil. He was punished to make us whole again. His wounds have healed us.*<sup>1s.53:4-5</sup>

In Bible times, when unclean people touched Jesus they became clean (holy) and they were whole. Jesus never became unclean from touching them and neither did He catch any disease or devils from them. *She said, "If I can just touch his clothes, I'll get well."*<sup>Mk.5:28</sup> *Those who were sick begged him to let them touch just the edge of his clothes. And all who touched him were healed.*<sup>Mk.6:56</sup> Although today we cannot touch Jesus physically because He is in heaven, we can touch Jesus spiritually by reaching out to Him in simple trust and accepting what he has done. Thomas thought that he had to touch Jesus physically in order to believe Him but Jesus said we are really blessed if we believe without seeing Him physically: *So they told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "First I must see the nail marks in his hands. I must put my finger where the nails were. I must put my hand into his side. Only then will I believe what you say." ... Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me but still have believed."*<sup>Jn.20:25-29</sup>

Jesus came to fulfilled the Scriptures: *Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.*<sup>Matt.5:17-18</sup> This means that Jesus fulfilled this Scriptures concerning the Altar: *the Altar will become soaked in holiness—anyone who so much as touches the Altar will become holy.* So now when we "touch" the Altar (Jesus) by connecting with Him through faith, we become holy because Jesus is holy: *Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.*<sup>Heb.2:11</sup> *Christ said, "You didn't want sacrifices and offerings. You didn't want burnt offerings and sin offerings. You weren't pleased with them." He said that even though the law required people to bring them... We have been made holy because Jesus Christ offered his body once and for all*

time. Every day each priest performed his religious duty. He offered the same type of sacrifice again and again. Yet, these sacrifices could never take away sins. However, this chief priest made one sacrifice for sins, and this sacrifice lasts forever... By that one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also gives witness to us about this.<sup>Heb.10:8-15</sup>

In Bible times power went out of Jesus when people touched Him and they were made whole: But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."<sup>Lk.8:46</sup> And today, there is still power coming from Jesus when people touch Him—and people are still being made whole—spiritually, emotionally and physically. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.<sup>Acts.1:8</sup> This power is the Person of God Himself, who He has promised to stay with us and empower us: But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me.<sup>Jn.15:26</sup> Don't be controlled by love for money. Be happy with what you have. God has said, "I will never leave you. I will never desert you." So we can say boldly, "The Lord helps me. I will not be afraid. What can a mere man do to me?"<sup>Heb.13:5-6</sup> God's power has given us everything we need to lead a godly life. All of that has come to us because we know the One who chose us. He chose us because of his own glory and goodness. He has also given us his very great and valuable promises. He did it so you could share in his nature. He also did it so you could escape from the evil in the world.<sup>2Pet.1:3-4</sup>

Occasionally we see or feel God's power in a dynamic way, but power doesn't have to be loud or noisy. The LORD said, "Go out. Stand on the mountain in front of me. I am going to pass by." As the LORD approached, a very powerful wind tore the mountains apart. It broke up the rocks. But the LORD wasn't in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire came. But the LORD wasn't in the fire. And after the fire there was only a gentle whisper.<sup>1Kg.19:11-12</sup> Mostly God's power is dispensed to us quietly: The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.<sup>Is.32:17</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength."<sup>Is.30:15</sup> Spiritual maturity is experiencing God's power and living in peace. But godliness with contentment is great gain.<sup>1Tim.6:6</sup> David could not build the Temple because he was a man of war—it took a man of peace, his son Solomon, to build a dwelling place for God: since you have shed so much blood in my sight, you will not be the one to build a Temple to honour my name. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace. I will give him peace with his enemies in all the surrounding lands. His name will be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel during his reign.<sup>1Chron.28:8-9</sup> This was an illustration that pointed to Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who would build a dwelling place for God in our hearts. David was blessed by God. So David asked if he could build a house for the God of Jacob. Instead, it was Solomon who built it for him. But the Most High God does not live in houses made by human hands.<sup>Acts.7:46-48</sup> Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.<sup>Rev.21:3</sup> 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."<sup>Jn.14:23</sup>

**Have you touched Jesus?** Jesus said, "Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me." ... In front of everyone, she told why she had touched him. She also told how she had been healed in an instant. Then he said to her, "Dear woman, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."<sup>Lk.8:46-48</sup>

If you haven't yet touched Jesus (or if you don't realise that you have touched Him), why not reach out to Him now and enjoy the benefits—wholeness, holiness, peace and contentment.

**If you have touched Jesus, you are now clean** (acceptable to God and holy): We are sending this letter to you, the members of God's church in Corinth. You have been made holy because you belong to Christ Jesus. God has chosen you to be his holy people. He has done the same for all those everywhere who pray to our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is their Lord and ours.<sup>1Cor.1:2</sup> So let's remain in fellowship with Jesus: You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you.<sup>Jn.15:3-4</sup>



He touched me, He touched me and O the joy that floods my soul.  
Something happened and now I know, Jesus touched me and made me whole.

## Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Ps.143:1-6. Mk.6

### And He gave them authority.<sup>Mk.6:7</sup>

In January we saw that the primary reason for ministry is to be with Jesus (which is fellowship). *That they might be with him and he would send them out to preach.*<sup>Mk.3:14</sup> Everything that we do **for God**—including preaching, evangelism, teaching, praying, etc.—is secondary to our fellowship **with God** and this is summarised in the “*greatest commandment*”: *Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.*<sup>Matt.22:36</sup> Everything we do of real value flows from loving God, and if we aren’t in fellowship with God, we will miss His standard for our lives (which is sin<sup>Rom.3:23</sup>) and we won’t have that touch of glory—that touch of eternity—that marks us out from the world. Jesus commissioned His twelve Disciples to preach—but that was just the beginning because He now commissions all His Disciples to preach: *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*<sup>Mk.16:15-16</sup> *And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.*<sup>1Tim.2:7</sup> However, preaching is not limited to delivering a sermon from a pulpit. “*Preaching*” (and according to Francis of Assisi, preaching can even be without words!) is proclaiming the gospel by any means possible, including, teaching, witnessing, testifying and sharing. But preaching is of little use if it is just words—we must have authority and action or we are impotent! A nice comment or an encouragement can help people feel better but we have more to offer than mere platitudes. Jesus gave His disciples authority and He gives us authority too: *He called the twelve apostles, sent them out two by two, and gave them authority over evil spirits.*<sup>Mk.6:7</sup> Another translation puts it this way: *He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil opposition.* We have authority over devils AND over their influence, but we exercise this authority through preaching (communicating) the Gospel, which is about **remission of sins** but this must start with **repentance of sins**: *So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent of their sins and turn to God. And they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with oil.*<sup>Mk.6:12-13</sup>

However, our authority is **delegated authority**—and it is delegated from Jesus Himself. The Roman Centurion understood delegated authority: *Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, ‘Go,’ and they go, or ‘Come,’ and they come. And if I say to my slaves, ‘Do this,’ they do it.*<sup>Matt.8:8-9</sup> But ungodly people (and immature Christians) resent Jesus’ authority: *So the Lord knows how to keep godly people safe in times of testing. He also knows how to keep ungodly people under guard until the day they will be judged. In the meantime, he continues to punish them. Most of all, this is true of people who follow the evil longings of their sinful natures. They hate to be under authority. Those false prophets are bold and proud. They aren’t afraid to speak evil things against heavenly beings. Angels are stronger and more powerful than those people. But even angels don’t bring to the Lord evil charges against heavenly beings. Those people speak evil about things they don’t understand. They are like wild animals. They do what comes naturally to them. They are born only to be caught and destroyed. Just like animals, they too will die. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done.*<sup>2Pet.2:9-13</sup>

If we are to exercise God’s authority we must be under God’s authority ourselves and hold to His values—Jesus went around doing good and we must go “*around doing good*” too: *You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Jesus went around doing good. He healed all who were under the devil’s power. God was with him.*<sup>Acts.10:38</sup> But we should remember that God’s “*good*” is also holy: *You didn’t think, did you, that just by pointing your finger at others you would distract God from seeing all your misdoings and from coming down on you hard? Or did you think that because he’s such a nice God, he’d let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he’s not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change.*<sup>Rom.2:3-4</sup> We should keep to the “*rules*” of religion, but not at the expense of compromising God’s values of

love and compassion; we should be nice to people too, but not at the expense of compromising God's values of holiness and righteousness—that is what the Pharisees did: *Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples. "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat," he said. "So you must obey them. Do everything they tell you. But don't do what they do. They don't practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on other people's shoulders. But they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them... How terrible it will be for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You pretenders! You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter. And you will not let those enter who are trying to. How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You pretenders! You travel everywhere to win one person to your faith. Then you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.*<sup>Mat.23:1-4;13-15</sup> At least thirteen times in the OT God is described as forgiving, gracious and compassionate and full of love: *But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.*<sup>Neh.9:17</sup> *But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*<sup>Ps.86:15</sup> If we don't display God's character, we are short sighted and treat with contempt God's forgiveness of our sin: *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. If you keep doing this, you will never fall away. Then you will also be given the wealth of entering into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*<sup>2Pet.1:5-11</sup>

People with God's authority are in fellowship with God (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit), with God's Word and with God's people—and they are "pleasant" to be around and a joy to be with. *How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in peace! It's like the special oil that was poured on Aaron's head. It ran down on his beard and on the collar of his robe. It's as if the dew of Mount Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. There the LORD gives his blessing. He gives life that never ends.*<sup>Ps.133</sup> But people who only pretend to have God's authority, isolate themselves—they are "unpleasant" to be around and certainly not a joy to be with: *A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment. A fool has no delight in understanding, But in expressing his own heart. (A loner is out to get what he wants for himself. He opposes all sound reasoning. A fool does not find joy in understanding but only in expressing his own opinion.)*<sup>Is.18:1-2</sup> We don't all have to all be married but no one should be alone—we can be single without being solitary: *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."*<sup>Gen.2:18</sup> *God sets the lonely in families.*<sup>Ps.86:6</sup> Wesley wrote that he travelled several miles to converse with a "serious man" who said to him, *Sir, You wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember you cannot serve Him alone; you must therefore find companions or make them. The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.* Sound words indeed!

**So what are you doing with the authority that God has given to you?** We certainly should not be "throwing our weight around" or dominating others. We are Jesus' servants and signposts, not security guards: *Don't imagine us leaders to be something we aren't. We are servants of Christ, not his masters. We are guides into God's most sublime secrets, not security guards posted to protect them. The requirements for a good guide are reliability and accurate knowledge.*<sup>1Cor.4:1-2</sup> Let's keep on using our authority to reliably and accurately inform others of God's Good News and, like John the Baptist, exhort people to trust God: *And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.*<sup>Lk.3:18</sup>



## Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Ps.143:7-12.

*As Dave Smethurst is with us this week I am using an article from Greg Koukl*

### Taking the Bible “Literally” or “Laterally”?

“*Literal*” means “*taking words in their usual or most basic sense without metaphor or allegory, free from exaggeration or distortion.*” Let’s face it, even non-Christians read the Bible in its “*usual or most basic sense*” most of the time on points that are not controversial. They readily take statements like “*love your neighbour as yourself*” or “*remember the poor*” at face value. When citing Jesus’ directive, “*Do not judge,*” they’re not deterred by the challenge, “*You don’t take the Bible literally, do you?*” No, when critics agree with the point of a passage, they take the words in their ordinary and customary sense. They naturally understand that language works a certain way in everyday communication, and it never occurs to them to think otherwise. Unless, of course, the details of the text trouble them for some reason. What of the opening chapters of Genesis? Is this a straightforward account describing historical events the way they actually happened? Were Adam and Eve real people, the first human beings? Was Adam created from dust? Did Eve really come from Adam’s rib? Did Jonah actually survive three days in the belly of a great fish? Did a virgin really have a baby? Such claims seem so fanciful to many people it’s hard for them to take the statements at face value. Other times, the critic simply does not like what he reads. He abandons the “*literal*” approach when he comes across something in the text that offends his own philosophical, theological, or moral sensibilities. Jesus the only way of salvation? No way. Homosexuality a sin? Please. A “*loving*” God sending anyone to the eternal torture of Hell? Not a chance. Notice the objection with these teachings is not based on some ambiguity making alternate interpretations plausible, since the Scripture affirms these truths with the same clarity as “*love your neighbour.*” No, these verses simply offend. Suddenly, the critic becomes a sceptic and sniffs, “*You don’t take the Bible literally, do you?*” This subtle double standard, I think, is usually at the heart of the taking-the-Bible literally challenge. Sometimes the ruse is hard to unravel.

Just because a biblical command is intended to be understood *literally*, does not mean it is intended to be applied *laterally*, that is, universally across the board, to **all** peoples, at **all** times, in **all** places. Jesus told Peter to cast his net in deep water (Luke 5:4). That’s exactly what Peter did because he took Jesus’ command literally, in its ordinary sense. He had no reason to think otherwise. However, because Jesus’ command to Peter was *literal* does not mean the same command applies *laterally* to everyone else. We’re not obliged to cast nets into deep water just because Peter was. If I’m asked if I take the Bible literally, I would say that I think that’s the wrong question. I’d say instead that I take the Bible in its ordinary sense, that is, I try to take the things recorded there with the precision I think the writer intended. I realize this reply might also be a bit ambiguous, but here, I think, that’s a strength. Hopefully, my comment will prompt a request for clarification. This is exactly what I want. I’d clarify by countering with a question: “*Do you read the sports page literally?*” “*Literally?*” you might respond. “*That depends. If the writer seems to be stating a fact—like a score, a location, a player’s name, a description of the plays leading to a touchdown—then I’d take that as literal. If he seems to be using a figure of speech, then I’d read his statement that way, figuratively, not literally.*” Sportswriters routinely use words like “*annihilated,*” “*crushed,*” “*mangled,*” “*mutilated,*” “*stomped,*” and “*pounded,*” yet no one speculates about literal meanings. Readers don’t scratch their heads wondering if cannibalism was involved when they read “*the Anaheim Angels devoured the St. Louis Cardinals.*” We recognize such constructions as figures of speech used to communicate in colourful ways events that actually (“*literally*”) took place. In fact, we never give those details a second thought because we understand how language works. When a writer seems to be communicating facts in a straightforward fashion, we read them as such. When we encounter obvious figures of speech, we take them that way, too. That’s the normal way to read the sports page. It’s also the normal—and responsible—way to read any work, including the

Bible. Always ask, “*What is this writer trying to communicate?*” This is exactly what I’m after when I say, “*I take the Bible in its ordinary sense.*” Of course, someone may differ with the clear point the Bible is making. Fair enough. There’s nothing dishonest about disagreement. Or they might think some Christian is mistaken on its meaning. Misinterpretation is always possible. Conjuring up some meaning that has little to do with the words the writer used, though, is not a legitimate alternative. If someone disagrees with the obvious sense of a passage, ask them for the reasons they think the text should be an exception to the otherwise sound “*ordinary sense*” rule. Their answer will tell you if their challenge is intellectually honest, or if they’re just trying to dismiss biblical claims they simply don’t like.

Reading any writing the ordinary way requires we understand two points about figurative speech, both implicit in the concept of metaphor. A metaphor takes one meaning of a word and then creatively levers it into another meaning to make an impact on a reader. Here is the first point to be clear on: All metaphors (or other forms of figurative writing) rely *first* on literal definitions *before* they can be of any use as figures of speech. All words must first be understood in their “*usual or most basic sense*” before they can be used metaphorically. We find, for example, the word “*shepherd*” prominently featured in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Do you see that we must first understand the literal meaning of “*shepherd*” before the phrase “*the Lord is my shepherd*” has any figurative power? **This point is critical for accurate biblical interpretation.** Here’s why. Sometimes we attempt to solve interpretive problems by digging through a Bible dictionary. This can be a helpful place to start, but since all figurative language trades in some way on dictionary definitions, the dictionary is not the final word. It can never tell you what *use* a specific writer is *making* of any particular word or phrase. Strictly speaking, since no word is a metaphor in itself—words cannot be used metaphorically unless they’re embedded in a context. Therefore, it makes no sense to ask of a solitary word, “*Is the word meant literally?*” because the word standing on its own gives no indication. Dictionaries, by definition can only deal with words in isolation. Other things—context, genre, flow of thought, etc.—determine if the word’s literal sense is being applied in a non-literal way, symbolically “*regarded as representative*” of something else. Take two sentences, “*The sunshine streamed through my window,*” and, “*Sweetheart, you’re a ray of sunshine to me this morning.*” *Sunshine’s literal meaning* is the same in each case. However, it is used *literally* in the first sentence, but *metaphorically* in the second. Further, unless my wife understands the literal meaning of “*sunshine,*” she will never understand the compliment I’m offering her in a poetic sort of way. So first, literal definitions must be in place first before a word can be used figuratively. Second, metaphors are always meant to *clarify*, not *obscure*. Once again, it’s always right to ask, “*What is the precise meaning the writer is trying to communicate with his colourful language?*” If there was one bit of wisdom, one rule of thumb, one useful tip I could offer to help you solve the riddle of Scriptural meaning, it’s this: **Never read a Bible verse—instead, always read a paragraph. Don’t forget the rule: Never read a Bible verse. Always read a paragraph** at least if you want to be confident you’re getting the right meaning of the verse.

**Do I take the Bible literally?** I try to take it at its plain meaning unless I have some good reason to do otherwise. This is the basic rule we apply to everything we read: novels, newspapers, periodicals, and poems. I don’t see why the Bible should be any different.

*Taken from STR November 2013 by Greg Koukl*

## April

Join me in giving glory to the LORD. Let us honour Him together. Ps.34:3

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. Ps.24. Matt.28.**

**Christ is Risen indeed!**

As evangelical Christians, we don't pay very much attention to the so called "Church Calendar" of holy days because for us **every day is a holy day**—every day is Resurrection Day and every day is Pentecost Day. [The Sabbath Day is **rest from working for** our salvation not a weekly enforced **rest of working from** our labour: *There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.*<sup>Heb.4:9-11</sup>] Christianity is not just words or a way to worship but a way of life—it is power! We don't have to keep 'holy days', but we do have days when we rejoice—days that have no parallel in all the world! Jesus wrought historic and eternal victories, releasing the power of salvation to all who believe when He died, rose from the dead and ascended to heaven nearly 2000 years ago—so now we celebrate the benefits of Jesus death and resurrection rather than the events themselves. *God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. Now he is exalted to the place of highest honour in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today.*<sup>Acts.2:32-33</sup> *When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honour at God's right hand.*<sup>Mk.16:19</sup> Christians need no holy clothes or special physical posturing; Christianity is of the heart, not the knees. *So don't let anyone judge you because of what you eat or drink. Don't let anyone judge you about holy days. I'm talking about special feasts and New Moons and Sabbath days. They are only a shadow of the things that were going to come. But what is real is found in Christ.*<sup>Col.2:16-17</sup> Jesus demands no pilgrimages, no visits to holy places or shrines—He asks for relationship not ritual, for trusting not trying, for love not labour. In fact, Paul had strong words about observing religious festivals: *So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world? You are trying to earn favour with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years. I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing. Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things.*<sup>Gal.4:9-12</sup> However, Jesus does make demands, but His demands are for love and concern, to do good, and to pray for others—even for our enemies! Jesus is **already** with every Believer, all the time. So as Christian worshipers, we don't seek God just to curry favour with Him about our sins because we have **already** found grace with Him and our sins are **already** expunged by His sacrifice on the Cross. Christians are not made by words or ceremonies, nor by joining a church or by belonging to a special race or country—Christians are made by a personal relationship with Jesus.

As Believers, we willingly and joyfully observe the activities that Jesus ordained, such as Breaking Bread together ("Communion" or "the Lord's Table"), Baptism, Preaching and making Disciples, etc.: *This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me... This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.*<sup>1Cor.11:24-25</sup> *I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*<sup>Matt.28:18-20</sup> *So wherever you go in the world, tell everyone the Good News. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the miraculous signs that will accompany believers: They will use the power and authority of my name to force demons out of people. They will speak new languages. They will pick up snakes, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them. They will place their hands on the sick and cure them.*<sup>Mk.16:15-18</sup> But these are ordinances not 'sacraments' that can impart spiritual merit—they

are not even a 'means of grace', even though many evangelical churches describe them as such. George Canty writes: "The phrase 'a means of grace' is a common and easy phrase—but they are weevil words corrupting beliefs. **Grace was the centre of theology until the Pentecostals showed the work of God was by the Holy Spirit**, not by any other emanation or force. The 'means of grace' meant ways to accumulate grace sufficient to give souls access to heaven, that is by religious acts, fasting, prayers and so on. Taking communion was a particularly good 'sacrament'—a meritorious physical act conferring automatic effects. Pentecostal thought, as I have known it for a lifetime, is that no physical act has any reward without the operation of faith. Salvation is by faith, not by any act, but faith must act to bring salvation".

When we became a Christian, God saved us from our sins and made us holy: *You have been made holy because you belong to Christ Jesus. God has chosen you to be his holy people. He has done the same for all those everywhere who pray to our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is their Lord and ours.*<sup>1Cor.1:2</sup> Holiness means "separation, consecration, and devotion to the service of God; sharing in God's purity and abstaining from earth's defilement." God is pure and undefiled and He has made us pure and undefiled by giving us a new spiritual nature and expunging our sins. So now we should live pure and undefiled lives that are devoted to God—and there can be no secular/sacred divide for the Christian! *But because the God who called you is holy you must be holy in every aspect of your life. Scripture says, "Be holy, because I am holy."*<sup>1Pet.1:15-16</sup>

This means that every aspect of our lives should be dedicated to God's service and every day is to be holy. *On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be carved on the bells of the horses. The cooking pots in the LORD's temple will be just like the sacred bowls in front of the altar for burnt offerings. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be set apart to the LORD. All those who come to offer sacrifices will get some of the pots and cook in them. At that time there won't be any Canaanites in the LORD's temple. He is the LORD who rules over all.*<sup>Zech.14:20-21</sup> Our home building is as holy as our Church building; our home utensils are as holy as our Church utensils; and every Believer is as holy as our Church leaders—Believers are called saints. *To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.*<sup>Eph.1:2</sup> *To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.*<sup>Phil.1:1</sup>

It is good to celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection at Easter (and Jesus' incarnation at Christmas) because Jesus' life, death and resurrection is pivotal to the Christian faith: *And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless... And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.*<sup>1Cor.15:14-20</sup> *Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles... What I am saying is true and reasonable.*<sup>Acts.26:23-25</sup> But these basic truths are so essential to our faith that we should celebrate them all through the year and not just at certain times. *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*<sup>Acts.2:46-47</sup>

**So let's enjoy Easter** but not get so bogged down with the rituals of remembrance (or even the details of doctrine) that we miss the point of **salvation**, which is **fellowship with God**. *Our faith is **NOT** useless and we are **NOT** guilty of our sins. Our hope in Christ is **NOT** only for this life, and we are **NOT** to be pitied more than anyone in the world. Because in fact Christ **HAS** been raised from the dead. **This is the Gospel** (Good News) and it is all about **Jesus**. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.*<sup>2Tim.2:8</sup>

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2018. Ps.36. Mk.7**

**We feast on the abundance of Your house!**



When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, he gave them generous helpings of food and drink which showed his generosity and the abundance of his provisions—even though it was in the time of famine: *While they were eating, some food was brought to them from Joseph's table. Benjamin was given five times as much as anyone else. So all of Joseph's brothers ate and drank a lot with him.*<sup>Gen.43:34</sup> The stories in the Bible that represent God always portray His generosity and the abundance of His provisions: *Finally, he came to his senses. He said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more food than they can eat, while I'm starving to death here?'*<sup>Lk.15:17</sup> *You satisfy my soul with the richest foods. My mouth will sing your praise with joyful lips.*<sup>Psa.63:5</sup> *How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*<sup>Psa.36:7-9</sup> Although God is generous and has an abundance of provisions, we need to comply with God's conditions if we are going to enjoy His generosity—we must be willing and obedient: *If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land.*<sup>Ls.1:19</sup> *If they obey him and serve him, they'll enjoy a long and happy life. Things will go well with them. But if they don't listen to him, they'll be killed with swords. They'll die because they didn't want to know anything about him.*<sup>Job.36:11-12</sup> Although these verses are from the OT, the spiritual principles in the Bible are timeless and apply to us today—so we too must be willing and obedient if we are to enjoy God's generosity. *Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.*<sup>Rom.1:5</sup> *And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.*<sup>2Jn.1:6-8</sup> When we are willing and obedient, there is an abundance of life for us to enjoy. Jesus said: *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*<sup>Jn.10:10</sup> And Paul wrote: *God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*<sup>2Cor.9:8</sup> However, we receive God's abundance (especially grace and peace) from knowing God and His Son, Jesus Christ: *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*<sup>2Pet.1:2</sup> *For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!*<sup>Rom.5:17</sup>

Although there is an abundance of provision in our Father's house, many Christians miss out because of their traditions. Tradition often blinds people or dulls their spiritual appetite so they don't know what God has actually said and then settle for sentimental superstition. This spiritualising of superstition is not new and was something that Jesus confronted. *'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.'* And he continued, *'You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!'*<sup>Mk.7:7-9</sup>

**The Bible is God's mind in a Book** and we argue with Him at our peril! *How terrible it will be for anyone who argues with his Maker!*<sup>Ls.45:9</sup> However, the real problem is not what is written in the Bible but how we understand what is written in it, because if we misunderstand the Bible we can miss out on God's abundant provisions including the "good health, full life and true prosperity" that we affirm each week in our Offering Prayer. Greg Koukl's article on taking the Bible literally or laterally is particularly helpful (see notes from 25<sup>th</sup> March): When reading any book (including the Bible), we should take its ordinary sense with the precision the writer intended. We also need to understand about metaphors—a metaphor takes one meaning of a word and then creatively levers it into another meaning to make an impact on a reader. All words must first be understood in their "usual or most basic sense" before they can be used metaphorically. For example, in Psalm 23, we must first understand the literal meaning of "shepherd" before the phrase "the Lord is my shepherd" has any figurative power. And metaphors are meant to *clarify*, not *obscure*,

which is why it is always right to ask, “*What is the precise meaning the writer is trying to communicate with his colourful language?*” That is why we should **never read a Bible verse but read the whole paragraph** so we always see it in context and especially the context of the New Testament, because apart from not following the normal grammar rules, the other common mistake that many Christians still make is to ignore the purpose of the Scriptures. The purpose of Scripture is to show us Jesus and how He has saved us from our sin. **The Bible is God’s written record of His plan of salvation for mankind as revealed in Jesus Christ His Son.** Jesus is the Word of God who descended from heaven and became a human being; He lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death, and after three days, He rose from the dead as our Saviour. Fifty days later, Jesus ascended to heaven from where He sent the Holy Spirit to us on earth: *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*<sup>Acts.2:32-33</sup> When Jesus introduced the New Covenant at His death, we came under new management—actually the old system never worked and so when it became obsolete, it was replaced.<sup>Heb.8:13</sup> If we don’t understand the purpose of Scripture and that Jesus our Saviour has completed His work, we will get distracted from God’s purpose, or even worse, be deceived and led astray.

Traditions (especially religious traditions) are often the reason why people get into error and they can nullify the authority of God’s Word: *Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. [Because of your traditions you have destroyed the authority of God's word.] And you do many things like that.*<sup>Mk.7:13</sup> God’s Name is above every Name: *So God lifted [Jesus] up to the highest place. He gave him the name that is above every name. When the name of Jesus is spoken, everyone's knee will bow to worship him. Every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow to worship him.*<sup>Phil.2:9-10</sup> But God’s Word is as important as His Name so we should make every effort to uphold the authority of God’s Word: *I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted.*<sup>Ps.138:2-3</sup> John the Apostle lived out his long life in Ephesus and taught a lot about loving God: *Everyone who loves the Father also loves his children. We know that we love God's children when we love God by obeying his commandments. To love God means that we obey his commandments. Obeying his commandments isn't difficult because everyone who has been born from God has won the victory over the world. Our faith is what wins the victory over the world. Who wins the victory over the world? Isn't it the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*<sup>1Jn.5:1-5</sup> But it was at Ephesus that the early Christians forsook their first love: *To the messenger of the church in Ephesus, write: Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*<sup>Rev.2:1-5</sup> <sup>13</sup> Let us always remember that first and greatest commandment is to love God deeply: *Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.*<sup>Matt.22:36</sup> **What have you received from God’s abundance?** You can have as much of God’s blessings as you want because God has an abundance provisions—but you must be willing and obedient to enjoy them. *Then Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever go hungry. And no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty.”*<sup>Jn.6:35</sup> <sup>36</sup> So never let traditions rob you of God’s abundant provisions but protect what God has given you like lion roaring over its prey;<sup>Is.5:29</sup> or like a farmer protecting his crops.<sup>Matt.13:4;19</sup>

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2018. Ps.145:1-10. Mk.8**

**Be very careful. Keep a sharp eye out for the contaminating yeast of Pharisees and the followers of Herod.**<sup>Mark.8:15</sup>

Last week we looked at how tradition can dull our spiritual senses and nullify the authority of the Word of God. Not that traditions are wrong—in fact anything that is repeated can be called

a “*tradition*”! But when we let tradition take precedence over the authority of God’s Word, we are no different from the Pharisees of Jesus’ day—the people He said “*woe*” to! *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites.*<sup>Mat.23:13-29</sup> Some traditions have crept into the Church’s culture that oppose the personal application of the New Covenant—traditions like the “*baptising*” of babies; the receiving of “*sacraments*” (as a “*means of grace*” to add spiritual merit); the ministry of “*deliverance*” from generational curses, and there are many more like these. But although these probably won’t destroy your faith, they are a distraction from God’s purposes. These traditions can also make fellowship with God tiresome instead of sweet and slide us into a legalistic routine. A rut is an open-ended grave, and if we feel compelled to perform rituals in order to worship God, we will soon be robbed of our joy and our traditions will become useless rituals that lead to death: *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, [from useless rituals] so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*<sup>Heb.9:14-15</sup> (However, there are some traditions that don’t appear to have been practised in the early Church which are helpful and also are “*good practice*”—traditions such as the dedication of babies; receiving Offerings in our services; serving coffee after our services; etc. There are other harmless traditions that have no Biblical foundation but are fun and now part of culture—like Easter eggs and Christmas trees!)

But ultimately, it is not what we think or what our traditions say—it is what God says that is important. If we are to grow up and become mature (able to handle any situation with confidence simple trust in God) we must move on from the basics of our faith: *By this time you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet here I find you need someone to sit down with you and go over the basics on God again, starting from square one—baby’s milk, when you should have been on solid food long ago! Milk is for beginners, inexperienced in God’s ways; solid food is for the mature, who have some practice in telling right from wrong. So come on, let’s leave the preschool finger-painting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ. The basic foundational truths are in place: turning your back on “salvation by self-help” [repentance from acts that lead to death] and turning in trust toward God; baptismal instructions; laying on of hands; resurrection of the dead; eternal judgment. God helping us, we’ll stay true to all that. But there’s so much more. Let’s get on with it!*<sup>Heb.5:12-6:3</sup> The Gospel really can set us free: *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*<sup>Gal.5:1</sup> *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*<sup>Phil.4:13</sup> But just because we are free (from the OT rules and regulations), we are not free to do absolutely anything—we have been freed to serve others in our service of God: *You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is beneficial. Don’t be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.*<sup>1Cor.10:23-24</sup>

Although religion is man’s attempt to relate to God, not every devout religious person is actually a lover of God and some display real “*dog-in-a-manger*” attitudes: *Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples. “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” he said. “So you must obey them. Do everything they tell you. But don’t do what they do. They don’t practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on other people’s shoulders. But they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them... How terrible it will be for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You pretend! You shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter. And you will not let those enter who are trying to. How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You pretend! You travel everywhere to win one person to your faith. Then you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.*<sup>Mat.23:1-4;13-15</sup> We must especially watch out for people who love tradition yet have no love for God, because their influence is pervasive like yeast and comes in unnoticed: *Be very careful. Keep a sharp eye out for the contaminating yeast of Pharisees and the followers of Herod.*<sup>Mark.8:15</sup> When Jesus gave this warning to His Disciples they had just seen

four thousand people fed from seven loaves, and yet even though they still had a loaf of bread left, they were concerned that might go hungry! But they didn't realise Jesus was using a metaphor, so Jesus had to explain it to them: *"Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!"* Then they understood that he didn't say to watch out for the yeast in bread, but to watch out for the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.<sup>1</sup>*Matt.16:11-12* Paul used the same metaphor of yeast when he gave instructions to live in sincerity and truth: *Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*<sup>1</sup>*Cor.5:6-8*

Some people have lost connection with the Head (Jesus): *Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ... Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize... They aren't connected to the Head. But the whole body grows from the Head.*<sup>1</sup>*Col.2:8-19* However, most people are not like that—they just look at life from a human point of view instead of from God's perspective. Peter was like that once: *Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."*<sup>1</sup>*Mk.8:33* And some of the people in the Corinthian Church were like that too: *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?*<sup>2</sup>*1Cor.3:3-4* However, if we live like mere humans, we will die like mere humans! *I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler.*<sup>1</sup>*Ps.82:6-7* Martin Luther said: *"You think like a man instead of thinking like God. Your thoughts concerning God are too human!"* We must look beyond the façade of mere appearances and think like God: *Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.*<sup>1</sup>*Jn.7:24* And we can think like God because we have been given the Holy Spirit and the mind of Christ: *"Who can ever know what is in the Lord's mind? Can anyone ever teach him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*<sup>1</sup>*Cor.2:16*

Besides being a lover of God, a good gauge of spiritual discernment is people's attitude to money. One of the basic requirements for spiritual maturity is **not** to be a "lover of money."<sup>1</sup>*1Tim.3:3* People who try to use religion as a means of accumulating wealth have lost connection with the Head (if they ever were connected!): *Suppose someone teaches ideas that are false. He doesn't agree with the true teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. He doesn't agree with godly teaching. People like that are proud. They don't understand anything. They like to argue more than they should. They can't agree about what words mean. All of that results in wanting what others have... They think religion is a way to become rich. A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that's enough. But if it's only money these leaders are after, they'll self-destruct in no time. Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after.*<sup>1</sup>*1Tim.6:2-10*

If we are to avoid the contamination of the Pharisees' yeast we must stay humble and look at life from God's perspective: *All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*<sup>1</sup>*Pet.5:5-7*

Our God is a big God who does everything wonderfully and right on time—never early and never late but always exactly as He had originally planned. Yes—**The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me.**<sup>1</sup>*Ps.138:8* *With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfil every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>2</sup>*1Thess.1:11-12*



**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2018. Ps.145:9-21.**

Peter Friday preached

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2018. Ps.146. Mk.9**

### **The Miracle of Metamorphosis!**

Metamorphosis is a biological process by which an animal physically changes its body structure after birth or hatching and is distinct from normal cell growth and development into adulthood. The word *metamorphosis* is usually applied to the transformation in insects from caterpillar to butterfly or in amphibians from tadpole to frog. This word is *metamorphosis* also used in the Bible for the transformation of Jesus when His appearance changed: *As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was **transformed**, and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them.*<sup>Mk.9:2-3</sup> Jesus, the Word of God—who was and who is eternally co-existent with the Father and the Holy Spirit—left His heavenly abode and in humility took on the form of a Servant: *So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*<sup>Jn.1:14</sup> When Jesus was on the earth, He retained His Deity but did not use it to His own advantage: *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.*<sup>Phil.2:6-11</sup> However, Jesus did reveal His Deity (His divine nature and His glory) in the miracles he performed: *This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.*<sup>Jn.2:11</sup> And Peter, James and John caught a glimpse of Jesus' glory when His appearance changed from natural to super-natural, from mortal to immortal, from physical to spiritual: *The appearance of his face changed. His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in shining glory.*<sup>Lk.9:29-31</sup>

Later, Jesus prayed that we could see His glory too: *Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began.*<sup>Jn.17:24</sup> And when Jesus returned to heaven at His ascension, He was “glorified” when He was honoured by the Father for His obedience and completion of our salvation. Jesus then shared His glory with us by sending us the Holy Spirit: *"Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)*<sup>Jn.7:38-39</sup>

Many years later, John saw Jesus' glory (divine nature) again: *It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast... When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw... someone like the Son of Man... And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.*<sup>Rev.1:10-16</sup> Although the metamorphosis that Jesus underwent on the mountain was miraculous, its purpose was didactic—it was to teach His Disciples (and us), about Jesus' divine nature of holiness and purity.

The second mention in the Bible of the word “*metamorphosis*” (*transformed*) explains that our minds (the way we think) can be changed by God through a life dedicated to God (a lifestyle of worship). *And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God **transform** you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and*

*pleasing and perfect.* <sup>Rom.12:1-2</sup> When we are converted and born-again, we are given a new spiritual nature that is like Jesus' nature: *as He is, so are we in this world.* <sup>1Jn.4:17</sup> *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.* <sup>Ezr.36:26</sup> Our spirits are already holy because we have *been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.* <sup>1Pet.1:23</sup> But God wants our physical nature (personality or soul) to be as holy and pure (glorious) as our spiritual nature is. *Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.* <sup>1Thes.5:23-24</sup> The purifying of our mind (soul) is called "sanctification" and is a life-long process that will only end when leave this fallen and sinful environment—either through death or when Jesus returns. *But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.* <sup>1Cor.15:51-53</sup> That will be the completion of our *metamorphosis*.

Like Paul, we can all agree that we have not yet arrived at perfection! *I have not yet received all of those things. I have not yet been made perfect. But I move on to take hold of what Christ Jesus took hold of me for. Brothers and sisters, I don't consider that I have taken hold of it yet. But here is the one thing I do. I forget what is behind me. I push hard toward what is ahead of me. I move on toward the goal to win the prize. God has appointed me to win it. The heavenly prize is Christ Jesus himself.* <sup>Phil.3:12-14</sup> So we need to make every effort to renew our minds through studying God's Word, fellowshiping with other Believers (that is by giving and receiving encouragement and by edifying one another).

The third and final use of the word "*metamorphosis*" (*transformed*) in the Bible is similar to the second and explains that we will be transformed into God's glorious nature (sanctified) as we reflect (or contemplate) God's glory. *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 **transformed** into his glorious image.* <sup>2Cor.3:18</sup> Our spiritual transformation is instant at conversion but our soul transformation (sanctification or maturity) takes effort and is the result of making the right choices as Christ is developed in our lives. *For everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced in the message of righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, whose perceptions are trained by practice to discern both good and evil.* <sup>Heb.5:13-14</sup> Maturity is Christ being fully developed in our lives: *Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labour pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.* <sup>Gal.4:19</sup> *But now we have died to those laws that bound us. God has broken their effect on us so that we are serving in a new spiritual way, not in an old way dictated by written words.* <sup>Rom.7:6</sup>

Although, Peter was extremely privileged to be an eye-witness of Jesus' *metamorphosis* his confidence was in the Scripture, God's Word, not his experience: *For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendour with our own eyes when he received honour and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts.* <sup>2Pet.1:16-19</sup> We revere the Holy Spirit and honour His ministry in the Church, but personal experiences are very subjective and can easily lead us astray and so we must validate everything by the clear and undisputed teaching of Scripture as interpreted through the New Covenant. Yes, thank God for the *miracle of metamorphosis*—and especially the miracles of the *metamorphosis* of our conversion and sanctification. So let's continue to make every effort to renew our minds and appreciate God's glory so that we become more like Jesus. *For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and*

*sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.*<sup>Rom.8:29-30</sup>

## May

I looked to the LORD, and He answered me. He saved me from everything I was afraid of. Ps.34:4

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Ps.147:1-11.**

### **Our Church's Vision and Values**

When we refer to our “**Vision**” we mean our focus—what we consider to be important enough to determine who we are and what we want to be known for. The obvious answer to “*what is our vision*” is **JESUS**. *Remember Jesus Christ, Raised from the dead. This is our gospel*<sup>2Tim2:8</sup>—and like the Greeks who came to Peter and said: *We want to see Jesus*,<sup>Jn.12:21</sup> we too want to see Jesus because it is through Jesus that God speaks to us today: *Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son.*<sup>Heb.1:1-2</sup> But what does “**our vision is Jesus**” really mean in our daily life? How do we implement this? It is obvious that we need to study the Bible because the only authorised and reliable record we have of Jesus is the Bible: *You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me.*<sup>Jn.5:39</sup> So in our Church we want all our members and adherents become more than just casual readers of the Bible and know what God has actually said, rather than merely repeating what others have told us—we want everyone to become Bible-literate. Being Bible-literate means that read the Bible with understanding, comparing scripture with scripture, so that we gain a working knowledge of God and His Kingdom. *Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.*<sup>2Tim.2:15</sup> God's Kingdom is the rule of Christ in our life (our obedience to Him) and so our knowledge of Him must be practical—we must live lives that honour God. Although God's Kingdom is a “*mystery*” (or a “*secret*”) it is now revealed in Jesus: *God decided to let his people know this rich and glorious secret which he has for all people. This secret is Christ himself, who is in you. He is our only hope for glory.*<sup>Col.1:27</sup> So we have an obligation to point the way to God clearly and concisely. *Don't imagine us leaders to be something we aren't. We are servants of Christ, not his masters. We are guides into God's most sublime secrets, not security guards posted to protect them. The requirements for a good guide are reliability and accurate knowledge.*<sup>1Col.4:1-2</sup>

We have listed our Church Values under 11 alliterated headings: **P**reaching and Teaching the Bible; **P**revailing Faith; **P**resence of God; **P**assionate Love for God; **P**raise, Worship and Glory; **P**rayers; **P**entecostal **P**ower—Holy Spirit Baptism; **P**ledge of a Good Conscience—Water Baptism; **P**roportional Giving; **P**rophetic Ministry Gifts; **P**astoral Care. But these values can be summarised more simply in these five **Love** statements:

**Love for Jesus:** We have a relationship with, and dependence on, Jesus as the Son of God, for which we give thanks in unashamed private and public praise that reflects our appreciation of Him – His worth-ship!

**Love for God's Word:** The Scriptures point to Jesus<sup>Jn.5:39</sup> and are reliable.<sup>Jn.10:35</sup> They are an insight into God's character and values; a manual for right and blessed living.<sup>Ps.119:11</sup> The Word of God really works in us who believe.<sup>1Thes.2:13</sup>

**Love for each other:** Our relationship with others (which will be different for each of us) is expressed with affection and concern – we care for one another enough to pray for and help each other.

**Love for the people of the world:** We witness to others, through our conversation, behaviour, and attitude, about God's glory, goodness, and love. This witness is rooted in our indebtedness to God for His love and grace toward us.



**Love for life – now and for ever:** We realise that this life is a gateway to eternity and our response to God now determines what happens when we die. We have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing so we aim to be a blessing to others.

These **Core Values** are the DNA of our Church—they are what we consider to be important enough for us to be known by, and they are what we live our lives by, because they will help us mature as Christians. We deliberately plan our Church Services and activities to incorporate these **Core Values** so we can stand firm in our faith: *We proclaim him [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect (complete or mature) in Christ.*<sup>Col.1:27-28</sup> “*Standing firm in our faith*” means that we keep our confidence in God regardless of our circumstances. Christianity is primarily a spiritual activity not a psychological activity and our confidence in God. Faith is not mind-over-matter or fatalism—“*what will be, will be*”—but it rather, faith is “*what God’s will is, will be*”. Faith is a confidence in God that is based on His Word (what God has revealed in the Scriptures) but our confidence is also backed up by our daily experience of God—by how He answers prayer and keeps His promises. It is only through hardships and difficulties that our faith is we really proven and so they are essential if we are to handle life with peace, joy, and confidence (become mature). Although our spiritual nature is transformed instantly at conversion (because we are given a new spirit that is holy and of an incorruptible seed<sup>1Pet.1:23</sup>) our soul nature (our personality) takes a life-time to completely transform. Although we will never actually reach complete maturity (sanctification), we must aim for it—this takes effort and is the result of making the right choices. *For everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced in the message of righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, whose perceptions are **trained by practice** to discern both good and evil.*<sup>Heb.5:13-14</sup> Maturity is Christ being fully developed in our lives: *Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I’m going through labour pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.*<sup>Gal.4:19</sup> *But now we have died to those laws that bound us. God has broken their effect on us so that we are serving in a new spiritual way, not in an old way dictated by written words.*<sup>Rom.7:6</sup>

Our activities and especially our Services are deliberate and intentional—they are planned to help each of us **hear the Word of God** because faith comes from hearing the Word of God: *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*<sup>Rom.10:17</sup> Another translations puts it this way: *Consequently faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ.* The preaching at our Church is Bible-based and planned so that the principles of God’s Kingdom are taught each week. The hymns and songs that we sing are deliberately chosen because their themes are God-centred (rather than self-centred or purely focussed on our emotions) and affirm God’s Word (most of our sub-conscious beliefs come from what we sing!). The Bible we watch each week on Video is another resource that we use to help us hear God’s Word, as are our Memory Verses and our Bible Studies. We also meet socially for food and fun because Christian Fellowship consists of more than just “*spiritual*” activities—besides our spirit (our God-conscious nature), we have a soul (our personality, will and emotions) and we live in a body—and every part of us should be nurtured in God’s love.

We are born physically into this world with a mortal body and we will one day die physically and leave our mortal body—**BUT** then comes the judgement when we will all face God, the Judge of all the earth: *each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.*<sup>Heb.9:27</sup> *And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone’s secret life.*<sup>Rom.2:16</sup> Our Church’s **Core Values** help us prepare for that final judgement by having peace with God through Jesus Christ **NOW**, so when we face God at the Final Judgement we will hear Him say: *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!*<sup>Matt.25:21</sup>

**Remember Jesus Christ, Raised from the dead. This is our gospel**<sup>2Tim2:8</sup>

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Ps.147:12-20.Mk.10:1-31**

### **Childlike not Childish**

*Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*<sup>Mk.10:15</sup>

To be like a child is to be simple, uncomplicated, free from worry or anxiety and sometimes naïve (in the sense that you don't expect ulterior motives and take people at their word). Whilst this is natural in a young child, when we grow up, we change and become “street-wise”, learning to anticipate problems before they ever occur—this is called survival! When Jesus said: *anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it,*<sup>Mk.10:15</sup> He was telling us to trust God in a simple, uncomplicated way that is free from worry and anxiety—to take God at His Word and never expect any ulterior motives from Him: *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.*<sup>Matt.7:11</sup> God is Spirit and His Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom, so Jesus was telling us to be childlike in our spiritual life, not in our material life. We need material things like food and clothes, but these are not to be our focus: *I tell you, do not worry. Don't worry about your life and what you will eat. And don't worry about your body and what you will wear. There is more to life than eating. There are more important things for the body than clothes... Don't spend time thinking about what you will eat or drink. Don't worry about it. People who are ungodly run after all of those things. Your Father knows that you need them. But put God's kingdom first. Then those other things will also be given to you. Little flock, do not be afraid. Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*<sup>Lk.12:22-32</sup>

When it comes to our material life we are to be *as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.*<sup>Matt.10:16</sup> *I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.*<sup>Rom.16:19</sup> Unfortunately, many Christians are naïve when it comes to material things such as resources, and often the world puts them to shame: *And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light. Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, you will be welcomed into eternal homes.*<sup>Lk.16:8-9</sup> We are to be childlike in our faith (simple, uncomplicated, etc.) but we must also “grow up” in our faith and not be continually spoon-fed like a child—we need adult spiritual food: *For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.*<sup>Heb.5:13-14</sup> To grow up in our faith we must have a certainty and confidence in the basics of our Christian doctrine: *So let us leave the simple teachings about Christ. Let us grow up as believers. Let us not start all over again with the basic teachings. They taught us that we need to turn away from doing things that lead to death. They taught us that we must have faith in God. They taught us about different kinds of baptism. They taught us about placing hands on people. They taught us that people will rise from the dead. They taught us that God will judge everyone. And they taught us that what he decides will last forever. If God permits, we will go beyond those teachings and grow up.*<sup>Heb.6:1-3</sup>

Our faith is the most important part of our life and so we are to make every effort to propagate, protect, and promote our faith: *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*<sup>Is.7:9</sup> *Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.*<sup>1Cor.16:13-14</sup> And that is what Church is for—to propagate, protect, and promote our faith. Church is when Believers come together to worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and this motivates us to encourage each other in the faith—that is, our trust and confidence in God. God has given Giftings to the Church to enable us to encourage each other in the faith and to help us grow into mature Believers: *Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer*

*be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.*<sup>Eph.4:11-15</sup>

Mature Believers are sound, stable, and secure in their faith, in their walk with God, and in their relations with other Christians. **Mature Believers are rarely deceived by false doctrines or taken in by deceivers.** However, extreme rumours (mostly called testimonies) abound among Christians—especially when there is mention of devils, angels, miracles, or the promise of financial reward!!! When these stories are shown to be false, it brings dishonour to God and discredits all the genuine miraculous interventions of God that are still happening today. *You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.*<sup>Ps.77:14</sup> So we should be careful to check out the stories we hear—even from preachers: *The Jews received Paul's message with enthusiasm and met with him daily, examining the Scriptures to see if they supported what he said.*<sup>Acts.17:11</sup>

My definition of a **Miracle** is: **God doing something for us that we can't do ourselves.** Sometimes God's intervention can be very dynamic or dramatic and sometimes God's intervention can appear almost mundane—but **EVERY intervention from God is miraculous** and should stimulate our appreciation and thanks. But the greatest intervention from God is **Conversion**—our new-birth—where we are translated from death to life; from darkness to light; from dishonour to honour; from despair to hope; from sadness to gladness; from shame to glory: *and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>Col.1:12-14</sup>

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*<sup>1Pet.2:9-10</sup> Our spiritual life and our material life become merged after conversion and we have one just Master or Lord—Jesus Christ: *“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord.’ You are right. That is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet. So you also should wash one another's feet. I have given you an example. You should do as I have done for you. “What I'm about to tell you is true. A servant is not more important than his master. And a messenger is not more important than the one who sends him. Now you know these things. So you will be blessed if you do them.”*<sup>Jn.13:13-17</sup> *There is one body. There is one Spirit. You were appointed to one hope when you were chosen. There is one Lord. There is one faith and one baptism. There is one God and Father of all. He is over everything. He is through everything. He is in everything.*<sup>Eph.4:4-6</sup> *There may be so-called gods either in heaven or on earth. In fact, there are many “gods” and many “lords. But for us there is only one God. He is the Father. All things came from him, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord. He is Jesus Christ. All things came because of him, and we live because of him.*<sup>1Cor.8:5-6</sup> *There is no sacred/secular divide for the Believer: On that day even the harness bells of the horses will be inscribed with these words: HOLY TO THE LORD. And the cooking pots in the Temple of the LORD will be as sacred as the basins used beside the altar. In fact, every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD of Heaven's Armies.*<sup>Zech.14:20-21</sup>

The result of *receiving the kingdom of God like a little child and entering it*<sup>Mk.10:15</sup> is described in the next verse—**Jesus blessed them:** *And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*<sup>Mk.10:16</sup> We must be childlike and stay hungry for the pure Word of God: *Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.*<sup>1Pet.2:2-3</sup> But we must not be childish and behave like children: *Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. Be like babies as far as evil is concerned. But be grown up in your thinking.*<sup>1Cor.14:20</sup>

**So let's keep our faith simple but enjoy the profoundness of God's kingdom, staying childlike in our faith but grown up in our understanding.**



## Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Ps.148. Mk.10:1-32-52

**How important do you think you are?** *Whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.*<sup>Mk.10:44-45</sup>

To decide how great someone is, we must first define “greatness”! The world defines “greatness” by how much authority, affluence, and influence someone has—so people like Princes, Premiers, Presidents, Prime-Ministers, Peers of the Realm, Politicians, Prelates, Professors and even pop-stars are considered great. By this reckoning, people like you and me could never achieve greatness, but God does not define greatness in this way—in fact Jesus called the people who define greatness that way as “pagan” and “ungodly”. *There is more to life than eating. There are more important things for the body than clothes... Don't spend time thinking about what you will eat or drink. Don't worry about it. People who are ungodly run after all of those things.*<sup>Lk.12:23-30</sup> Paul the Apostle said that if you counted “greatness” that way, then he was one of the greatest! He came from the best of families (socially and religiously) and he had been given the best education money could buy. *Then Paul said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel.*<sup>Acts.22:3</sup> Although Paul once prided himself in these natural qualifications, he no longer counted them of any value because he now belonged to a spiritual kingdom and these were not spiritual qualifications: *We don't place any confidence in physical things, although I could have confidence in my physical qualifications. If anyone else thinks that he can trust in something physical, I can claim even more. I was circumcised on the eighth day. I'm a descendant of Israel. I'm from the tribe of Benjamin. I'm a pure-blooded Hebrew. When it comes to living up to standards, I was a Pharisee. When it comes to being enthusiastic, I was a persecutor of the church. When it comes to winning God's approval by keeping Jewish laws, I was perfect.*<sup>Phil.3:3-6</sup> Paul claimed that his natural qualifications were worthless in God’s spiritual kingdom and the only qualification that God recognised was knowing Jesus Christ personally: *These things that I once considered valuable, I now consider worthless for Christ. It's far more than that! I consider everything else worthless because I'm much better off knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. It's because of him that I think of everything as worthless. I threw it all away in order to gain Christ and to have a relationship with him. This means that I didn't receive God's approval by obeying his laws. The opposite is true! I have God's approval through faith in Christ. This is the approval that comes from God and is based on faith that knows Christ. Faith knows the power that his coming back to life gives and what it means to share his suffering. In this way I'm becoming like him in his death, with the confidence that I'll come back to life from the dead.*<sup>Phil.3:7-11</sup> Even Paul’s Christian experiences carried little weight with him because his confidence was in Christ alone: *I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have travelled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm... **If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am.***<sup>2Cor.11:23-33</sup>

The only qualification that really counts in God’s kingdom is God’s qualification of redemption: *giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>Col.1:12-14</sup> (Note that this is “sharing in the inheritance of the saints”—this is not just **your** faith but your faith **with** other Believers **in** the kingdom of light.) And without God’s qualification, we have no authority to do anything in



God's kingdom. Actually, in God's kingdom our natural abilities can be a hinderance rather than a help to us because we tend to rely on what we can do ourselves, rather than what God can do through us. *Brothers and sisters, consider what you were when God called you to be Christians. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view. You were not in powerful positions or in the upper social classes. But God chose what the world considers nonsense to put wise people to shame. God chose what the world considers weak to put what is strong to shame. God chose what the world considers ordinary and what it despises—what it considers to be nothing—in order to destroy what it considers to be something. As a result, no one can boast in God's presence. You are partners with Christ Jesus because of God. Jesus has become our wisdom sent from God, our righteousness, our holiness, and our ransom from sin. As Scripture says, "Whoever boasts must boast about what the Lord has done."*<sup>1Cor.1:26-31</sup> Of course, God can and does use people with natural abilities and resources: *Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*<sup>Lk.8:3</sup> But even though God does choose some rich and influential people, we each come to God through Jesus Christ alone—*Just as I am without one plea, save that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bid'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come!*

The highest value in God's kingdom is **LOVE**—pure, selfless and genuine love—we are to **love God** (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) **first**—c.f. *the Good Samaritan*, and then we are to **love everything about Him**—His Word, His Church, His Creation (people and nature). Without love, we are nothing and achieve nothing: *I may speak in the languages of humans and of angels. But if I don't have love, I am a loud gong or a clashing cymbal. I may have the gift to speak what God has revealed, and I may understand all mysteries and have all knowledge. I may even have enough faith to move mountains. But if I don't have love, I am nothing. I may even give away all that I have and give up my body to be burned. But if I don't have love, none of these things will help me.*<sup>1Cor.13:1-3</sup> All our achievements will soon fade away but our love for God has an eternal reward: *Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honoured them. And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements. God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*<sup>Jas.1:9-12</sup> After denying Jesus, when Peter was at his lowest, Jesus did not rebuke him or ask him to do penance, but merely asked Peter: *Do you love Me—more than these?*<sup>2n.21:15</sup> When Jesus asked John to write to the Church at Ephesus, His complaint against them was that they had lost their first love: *But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.*<sup>Rev.2:4-5</sup> It is little wonder that John, who became an Elder at the Church in Ephesus, wrote so much about love—loving God and loving one another: *So we know that God loves us. We depend on it. God is love. Anyone who leads a life of love shows that he is joined to God. And God is joined to him.*<sup>1Jn.4:16</sup> John uses the word "love" 32 times in his 3 letters because love is greater than anything else.

Being great in God's estimation is not measured by what we have, or by what we have done **but by our love** for God (including everything that God loves) and whether we have remained faithful—faithful as true to our calling but also faithful as full of faith. Talk is cheap and we must walk the talk—live the life as well as saying the right words: *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*<sup>1Cor.4:20</sup> Remember, God's kingdom not a physical kingdom but a spiritual kingdom: *God's kingdom has nothing to do with eating or drinking. It is a matter of being right with God. It brings the peace and joy the Holy Spirit gives. Those who serve Christ in this way are pleasing to God. They are pleasing to people too. So let us do all we can to live in peace. And let us work hard to build each other up.*<sup>Rom.14:17-19</sup> Once we been qualified by God (to share in the inheritance of the saints) we are important and truly great: *I tell you, no one more important than John has ever been born. But the least important person in*

*God's kingdom is more important than he is.*<sup>Lk.7:28</sup> So let's live as great people by being His servants—which is what God expects from all of us.

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### **Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Ps.149. Mk.11**

*By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right to do them?*<sup>Mk.11:28</sup>

Last week we saw that God has *qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints,*<sup>Col.1:12</sup> and that this qualification only comes through *redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>Col.1:14</sup> No other qualification carries any authority in God's Kingdom because God is Spirit and so His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. This means that to function in God's kingdom we must be qualified spiritually, i.e. we must be redeemed and we know that our sins are forgiven. This is what being “*born-again*” means and if we are not clear on this pivotal fact, we will falter at every difficulty that comes our way. *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*<sup>Is.7:9</sup> When we are born-again, we consciously reject our old way of life and start a new life in Christ—we have a new spiritual beginning.<sup>2Cor.5:17</sup> This means that our past is redeemed and all our sins are forgiven—even those we have not yet committed: *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*<sup>1Jn.1:7</sup> So now we can stand before a holy God without any guilt, shame or dishonour: *Who can go up to the temple on the hill of the LORD? Who can stand in his holy place? Anyone who has clean hands and a pure heart.*<sup>Ps.24:3-4</sup>

Our personality is moulded by the way we think and behave and because we still have both conscious and sub-conscious memories of our past, our past can still affect us even though the New-Birth gives us a brand-new spiritual start in life. However, not all our pre-Christian life was inherently evil—it just did not take God into consideration! But now we have acknowledged Jesus Christ as our Lord and asked Him to save us from our sins, we must take God into consideration. We should involve God in every part of our life and this takes work—it takes study and the support of others. (That is why giving thanks together for our meals is a good habit because it not only honours God and shows our appreciation of His provision, but it also gives support to those who are eating.) Our mind-sets and thought-patterns are not immediately changed at conversion—they took many years to form and so they will take time and work to change. But they will change as we intentionally make the right choices and are careful to learn from our wrong choices! This is called “*renewing our minds*”—making them new by immersing them in the Word of God: *Don't live any longer the way this world lives. Let your way of thinking be completely changed. Then you will be able to test what God wants for you. And you will agree that what he wants is right. His plan is good and pleasing and perfect.*<sup>Rom.12:2</sup> *You were taught not to live the way you used to. You must get rid of your old way of life. That's because it is polluted by longing for things that lead you down the wrong path. You were taught to be made new in your thinking. You were taught to start living a new life. It is created to be truly good and holy, just as God is.*<sup>Eph.4:22-24</sup> *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*<sup>Eph.5:25-26</sup> We must also ensure that we say the right things as well as think the right things—as Bosworth says: **Make your lips do their duty; fill them with the Word. Make them say what God says about your situation. Don't allow them to say anything to the contrary.** *What you learned was the truth about Jesus. You were taught not to live the way you used to. You must get rid of your old way of life. That's because it is polluted by longing for things that lead you down the wrong path. You were taught to be*

*made new in your thinking. You were taught to start living a new life. It is created to be truly good and holy, just as God is. So each of you must get rid of your lying. Speak the truth to your neighbour. We are all parts of one body. Scripture says, "When you are angry, do not sin." Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. Don't give the devil a chance.* <sup>Eph.4:21-27</sup> *You are the children that God dearly loves. So be just like him. Lead a life of love, just as Christ did. He loved us.* <sup>Eph.5:1-2</sup>

Because we are now qualified to work for God and to speak on His behalf, we must take our life (ministry) seriously. In the natural, if someone (say a Policeman) were to throw their weight around and boast about how much authority they have, they would very soon be invited for "a quiet talk" with their superiors! It is the same in the spiritual—now we are qualified by God and have been given authority by Him to "preach, heal and deliver"<sup>Mat.28:18-20</sup> we should exercise our authority reverently and honourably or we may be invited for "a quiet talk" by our Superior—by God Himself! And what if God wants us to meet Him face-to-face! This actually happened in Corinth! *This is the reason why many of you are weak and sick and quite a number «of you» have died. If we were judging ourselves correctly, we would not be judged. But when the Lord judges us, he disciplines us so that we won't be condemned along with the rest of the world.* <sup>1Cor.11:30-32</sup>

Using our authority properly means acting properly under God's authority and we have no authority unless God gives it to us. Even Jesus relied on His Father's authority: *I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. And I know his commands lead to eternal life; so I say whatever the Father tells me to say.* <sup>Jn.12:49-50</sup> The Centurion understood this principle: *"For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him and said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."* <sup>Lk.7:8-9</sup>

Our authority as Believers is limited to promoting the Kingdom of God and does not include making life easy or comfortable for ourselves. Jesus did not use His Deity to His own advantage: *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.* <sup>Phil.2:5-6</sup> So when Jesus was hungry, He did not turn the stones into bread. But Jesus did multiply the 5 loaves and 2 fishes to feed the 5000 when they were hungry! When Jesus said we can "move mountains", He was using a figure of speech—He meant mountains that are obstacles, not literal mountains! We can move the obstacles that are between people and God—especially those obstacles in our own life. This was what John the Baptist came to do and what we should do: *At that time God's word came to John, in the desert. He preached that people should be baptized and turn away from their sins. Then God would forgive them. "A messenger is calling out in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him. Every valley will be filled in. Every mountain and hill will be made level. The crooked roads will become straight. The rough ways will become smooth. And everyone will see God's salvation."* <sup>Lk.3:2-6</sup>

Our specific day-to-day activities are not dictated to us by God because He has given us free rein to live our life—but only within the boundaries of kingdom principles. Nowhere in the NT do we read of people seeking God's will concerning what to eat, what to wear, where to live, or even where to go—people did these things as they wanted. But if God did want to instruct them, He intervened with a dream or a prophesy—but not when they were praying about directions!!! God has given us the Scriptures and told us to live by the Kingdom principles recorded in them, which is why we need to be Bible-literate! God has also given us a conscience to guide us in His instructions and the Holy Spirit to enable us to follow His instructions! Although we are given free-rein to live our lives, when we make the right choices, it is only what is expected of us—it is no credit to us! *It's the same with you. Suppose you have done everything you were told to do. Then you should say, 'We are not worthy to serve you. We have only done our duty.'* <sup>Lk.17:10</sup>

If we think that we are special or important when we do right, we are no different from the Pharisees of Jesus' day who tried to impress God with their religious rituals. *Be careful not to do*

*'good works' in front of others. Don't do them to be seen by others. If you do, your Father in heaven will not reward you. When you give to needy people, do not announce it by having trumpets blown. Do not be like those who only pretend to be holy. They announce what they do in the synagogues and on the streets. They want to be honoured by others. What I'm about to tell you is true. They have received their complete reward.*<sup>Matt.6:1-2</sup> No attempt to impress God ever works! In Bible symbolism, fig-leaves represent religion (our attempt to make ourselves acceptable before God). Adam used fig leaves to cover himself but God saw straight through them—and so did Adam! That is why when Jesus cursed the fig tree, the leaves immediately withered—God has finished with religion as a means of making oneself acceptable before Him. God made clothes for Adam and He has made clothes for us—clothes of Righteousness. *For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.*<sup>Is.61:10</sup> *The Marriage of the Lamb has come; his Bride has made herself ready. She was given a bridal gown of bright and shining linen. The linen is the righteousness of the saints.*<sup>Rev.19:7-8</sup>

We started by reading the questions posed to Jesus: *By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right to do them?*<sup>Mk.11:28</sup> We know that Jesus only acted under God's authority because He was completely obedient to His Father's will. When we ask ourselves those same questions (*By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right to do them?*) we should now be able to answer that because God has qualified us through *redemption, the forgiveness of sins,*<sup>Col.1:14</sup> we live under God's authority. When we know this as fact—both as objective fact (it is true) and subjective fact (it is true for me), then we can proclaim, pray and even prophesy with conviction and confidence (remember, NT prophesy is giving a clear witness to Jesus<sup>Rev.19:10</sup>). That is what God expects from us so let's live like it!



## June

Those who look to Him beam with joy. They are never put to shame. Ps.34:5

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2018. Ps.149.

### Joshua

The Bible is a great Book with many different styles of writing—prose, poetry, parable, prophesy, but the Bible was written for a purpose: to reveal God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. *You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. These Scriptures are all about me!*<sup>1n.5:39</sup> *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in front of his disciples. They are not written down in this book. But these are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him.*<sup>1n.20:30-31</sup> *You have known the Holy Scriptures ever since you were a little child. They are able to teach you how to be saved by believing in Christ Jesus.*<sup>2Tim.3:15</sup>

There are hundreds of wonderful stories about most subjects—especially history and nature.

*Parson brought 'is Bible and came to read to me.*

*“'ave what you like, there's everything within this Book,” says he.*

*Says I, “They've left the 'orses out.” Says 'e, “You are mistook;”*

*An' 'e up an' read a 'eap of things about them from the Book.*

*Arthur Conan Doyle*

But each story has the ability to produce spiritual life in us because God breathed His life into those stories—they are not just **history** but **His Story—His Story of redemption!** *God has breathed life into all of Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, a man of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing.*<sup>2Tim.3:16-17</sup>

Many people think that what's written in the Bible has mostly to do with getting people into heaven—getting right with God, saving their eternal souls. It does have to do with that, of course, but not mostly. It is equally concerned with living on this earth—living well, living in robust sanity. In our Scriptures, heaven is not the primary concern, to which earth is a tag-along afterthought. “*On earth as it is in heaven*” is Jesus' prayer. “*Wisdom*” is the biblical term for this on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven everyday living. Wisdom is the art of living skilfully in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves. It has virtually nothing to do with information as such, with knowledge as such. A college degree is no certification of wisdom—nor is it primarily concerned with keeping us out of moral mud puddles, although it does have a profound moral effect upon us. *These are the wise sayings of Solomon, David's son, Israel's king—Written down so we'll know how to live well and right, to understand what life means and where it's going; A manual for living, for learning what's right and just and fair; To teach the inexperienced the ropes and give our young people a grasp on reality. There's something here also for seasoned men and women, still a thing or two for the experienced to learn—Fresh wisdom to probe and penetrate, the rhymes and reasons of wise men and women. Start with GOD—the first step in learning is bowing down to GOD,*<sup>Prov.1:1-7</sup>

The history parts of the Bible are not just for information (although they are useful for that) but they have a specific purpose: *Those things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who are living at the time when God's work is being completed. So be careful. When you think you are standing firm, you might fall. You are tempted in the same way all other human beings are. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted any more than you can take. But when you are tempted, God will give you a way out so that you can stand up under it.*<sup>1Cor.10:11-13</sup> *Everything written long ago was written to teach us so that we would have confidence through the endurance and encouragement which the Scriptures give us.*<sup>Rom.15:4</sup>

This includes the stories of Joshua and his stories were written down to teach us, to warn us and to encourage us. Most people only remember the story of Joshua and the Battle of Jericho

but there is much more to him than that—**Joshua is a type or an illustration of Jesus.** **Joshua** and **Jesus** are the same word and mean **Saviour**: *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*<sup>Mat.1:21</sup> As we read about Joshua, we will see aspects of our Saviour and our salvation in those stories.

The first mention of Joshua is at **Rephidim**. It was here that the Israelites ran out of water but when Moses hit the rock there was enough water for everyone. *They camped at Rephidim. But there wasn't any water for the people to drink... Take in your hand the wooden staff you used when you struck the Nile River. Go. I will stand there in front of you by the rock at Mount Horeb. Hit the rock. Then water will come out of it for the people to drink.* So Moses hit the rock in the sight of the elders of Israel.<sup>Ex.17:1-6</sup> Paul states that this Rock represented Jesus. *They all drank the same supernatural water. They drank from the supernatural rock that went with them. That rock was Christ.*<sup>1Cor.10:4</sup> Jesus sent the water of the Holy Spirit when He was “hit” (i.e. when He died): *Jesus stood up and spoke in a loud voice. He said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Does anyone believe in me? Then, just as Scripture says, streams of living water will flow from inside him.” When he said this, he meant the Holy Spirit. Those who believed in Jesus would receive the Spirit later. Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given. This was because Jesus had not yet received glory.*<sup>Jn.7:37-39</sup> Unfortunately, the Israelites did not really believe that God was with them and nor did they trust God completely either: *Moses called the place Massah and Meribah. That's because the people of Israel argued with him there. They also put the LORD to the test. They asked, “Is the LORD among us or not?”*<sup>Ex.17:7</sup> This teaches us that we can be saved and receive the Holy Spirit but still question whether God is with us or whether He will care for us. This story was written so we don't make the same mistakes that the Israelites made. Yes! God really will care for us because He is with us all the time—His name is Emmanuel.

Soon after Moses struck the rock the Amalekites attacked the Israelites. The Amalekites attacked God's people and so God said they would be destroyed: *Then Balaam saw the people of Amalek. He spoke the message he had received from God. He said, “Amalek was the first nation to attack Israel. But they will finally be destroyed.”*<sup>Nu.24:20</sup> The Amalekites represent the devil who is a liar and a deceiver. When Saul died, an Amalekite lied to David to take the credit for killing him: *Saul spoke to the man who was carrying his armour. He said, “Pull out your sword. Stick it through me. If you don't, those fellows who aren't circumcised will come. They'll stick their swords through me and hurt me badly.” But the man was terrified. He wouldn't do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. The man saw that Saul was dead. So he fell on his own sword and died with him.*<sup>1Sam.31:4-5</sup> “He asked me, ‘Who are you?’ “‘An Amalekite,’ I answered. “Then he said to me, ‘Stand over me and kill me! I'm close to death, but I'm still alive.’ “So I stood over him and killed him. I did it because I knew that after he had lost the battle he would be killed anyway. So I took the crown that was on his head. I also took his armband. I've brought them here to you. You are my master.”<sup>2Sam.1:8-10</sup>

Joshua fought against the Amalekites—and won! This story illustrates Jesus' victory over Satan: *So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”*<sup>Ex.17:10-14</sup>

No single illustration can fully describe God's wonderful and complete plan of salvation and so here we have both Moses and Joshua both representing Jesus—Joshua who defeated the Amalekites represents Jesus who defeated the devil and Moses who interceded for Joshua represents Jesus who intercedes for us as we resist the devil. Although Jesus disarmed and defeated the devil at Calvary, the devil is still able to deceive us—**but we will never overcome**

**the devil by ourselves**—we need Jesus to intercede for us: *That is why he is always able to save those who come to God through him. He can do this because he always lives and intercedes for them.*<sup>Heb.7:25</sup>

As the Israelites were to wipe out the memory of the Amalekites, we too should forget about the devil because he has no authority over us now Jesus has defeated him: *Remember what the Amalekites did to you on your way out of Egypt. You were tired and worn out. They met you on your journey. They attacked everyone who was lagging behind. They didn't have any respect for God. The LORD your God will give you peace and rest from all of the enemies who are around you. He'll do it in the land he's giving you to take over as your very own. Then you will wipe out the memory of the Amalekites from the earth. Don't forget to do it!*<sup>Dent.25:17-19</sup>

Yes the Bible is a wonderful Book but it is a spiritual Book and it gives spiritual life to those who ask and seek. **Let us keep looking to Jesus. He is the author of faith. He also makes it perfect.**<sup>Heb.12:2</sup>

**More about Joshua next month's Family Service!**

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2018. Ps.150. Mk.12:1-27**

**In the world but not of the world!**

*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. And give to God what belongs to God.*<sup>Mk.12:17</sup>

Last week we saw that the Bible is not primarily concerned with heaven, to which earth is a tag-along afterthought, but with earth—with living our lives in the here and now. Jesus taught us to pray: “On earth as it is in heaven”! Although the Bible explains how to **get into heaven** (by believing God raised Jesus from the dead and confessing Him as Lord<sup>Rom.10:9-10</sup>) it is equally concerned with **getting to heaven** and warns that we can be disqualified if we don't live “faithful” lives: *Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! ...I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*<sup>1Cor.9:24-27</sup> **Wisdom** is the biblical term for this *on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven* everyday living and is the art of living skilfully in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves. Wisdom is much more than knowledge—it is the **application** of knowledge and especially the knowledge about God and His Kingdom. *These are the wise sayings of Solomon, David's son, Israel's king—Written down so we'll know how to live well and right, to understand what life means and where it's going; A manual for living, for learning what's right and just and fair; To teach the inexperienced the ropes and give our young people a grasp on reality. There's something here also for seasoned men and women, still a thing or two for the experienced to learn—Fresh wisdom to probe and penetrate, the rhymes and reasons of wise men and women. Start with GOD—the first step in learning is bowing down to GOD.*<sup>Prov.1:1-7</sup> And wisdom is epitomised in Jesus: *Because of what God has done, you belong to Christ Jesus. He has become God's wisdom for us. He makes us right with God. He makes us holy and sets us free.*<sup>1Cor.1:30</sup>

When we are spiritually re-born, God is our Father and heaven is our home but there are good reasons why we must stay here in this sin-torn, hurting world for a while longer—we are to tell others how they can get to heaven and our character needs developing now before we get there! The last thing Jesus said to His Disciples before He returned to heaven was: **Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.** *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*<sup>Mk.16:15-16</sup> God has already done everything necessary to save people by sending His Son Jesus: *God sent his Son to save the world through him.*<sup>Jn.3:17</sup> He has also recorded everything we need to know about getting saved in the Book we call the Bible. *I want him to warn them so they don't end up in this place of torment.' "But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.' "The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.' "But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"*<sup>Lk.16:28-31</sup> Regardless of whether we are good and accurate witnesses or poor



and inaccurate witnesses, we are still Jesus' witnesses. God is in heaven and we are His representatives on earth and the only "Bible" that most people will ever read! He only has our mouth and our feet to get the message out—if we don't go, they won't know! *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How can they call on him unless they believe in him? How can they believe in him unless they hear about him? How can they hear about him unless someone preaches to them? And how can anyone preach without being sent?*<sup>Rom.10:13-15</sup>

We are also here on earth to develop our character—God expects us to grow up! We are to leave our childish ways and grow up into loving, caring, compassionate, stable, mature adults who are trusting God confidently and completely. This is not instantaneous but a process that involves learning from the good choices we make—and learning from the bad choices we make! *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*<sup>Phil.3:12-14</sup>

We will never effectively reach others if we live in isolation because we need to preach to **people** if they are to hear! And will never we grow up if we live in isolation because we need to interact with **people** if we are to mature! *A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment [he defies all sound judgment].*<sup>Pron.18:1</sup> Difficulties and troubles aren't just inconveniences—they are essential ingredients of life. *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*<sup>Jas.1:2-4</sup> Even Jesus learnt obedience through suffering: *Though he was God's Son, he learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do. Then, having arrived at the full stature of his maturity.*<sup>Heb.5:8-9</sup>

Although we are citizens of heaven, we are still on this earth and so we must live as citizens of this world and abide by the rules of this world—but we should not abide by the values of **this world**: *many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>Phil.3:18-20</sup> The Old Covenant was originally a "theocracy" where God Himself was King, but it never worked because the citizens were always rebellious against God and they wanted a human ruler! But when Jesus came, He replaced the Old Covenant with the New Covenant and announced that the promised Kingdom of God was now here: *The law and the prophets were in force until John; since then, the good news of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed, and everyone is urged to enter it.*<sup>Lk.16:16</sup> *Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*<sup>Mk.1:14-15</sup> **But God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom** and runs parallel to the natural kingdoms of this earth—Jesus is seated on His throne in heaven not on earth! *Jesus, grilled by the Pharisees on when the kingdom of God would come, answered, "The kingdom of God doesn't come by counting the days on the calendar. Nor when someone says, 'Look here!' or, 'There it is!' And why? Because God's kingdom is already among you."*<sup>Lk.17:20-21</sup>

When people try to establish a "Christian" kingdom on earth they always fail because people cannot be forced to keep God's laws. God's kingdom is the rule of Christ in people's hearts—a personal submission to Christ—it is not a rule that can be imposed. *But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off*



for good—crucified.<sup>Gal.5:22-24</sup> In the C16<sup>th</sup> the Anabaptists, under Jan of Leiden, attempted to set up the kingdom of God by force in Münster (Germany) by founding a democratic proto-socialistic state. They claimed all property, burned all books except the Bible, and called it the "New Jerusalem" believing that they would capture the entire world and purify it of evil with the sword in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ and the beginning of the Millennium. Using the O.T. to validate violence, polygamy and theocracy, Münster became the scene of great atrocities and left the name of "Anabaptist" in odious repute. After a year-long siege, the people were starving and eventually the town was recaptured. The leaders were tortured to death and their corpses exhibited in metal baskets (which can still be seen hanging from the Tower of St. Lambert's in Münster today). Although most people now associate this debacle with the Anabaptists, it was totally out of character with the majority of Anabaptists and completely divorced from the evangelical biblical heart of the movement. Other evangelical Christians have tried to establish a kingdom for God on earth but they have all failed because God's kingdom is God's rule inside of us, not outside of us. Most of those who tried to establish God's kingdom have relied more on prophecy and personal "revelation" than on the "the more sure prophetic word" of the Scriptures: *knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.*<sup>2Pet.1:20</sup> At the end of the C19<sup>th</sup> Alexander Dowie established Zion City on the outskirts of Chicago and Frank Sandford established Shiloh in Maine but they were both short-lived (even though their legacy lives on). These attempts to establish an earthly kingdom for God have come from misunderstanding what sort of king Jesus is: *Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world."*<sup>Matt.18:36</sup> Jesus said He would prepare a place for us and return to collect us<sup>Jn.14:1-4</sup> not that we should prepare a place for Him!

We are New Covenant Believers who are already in God's spiritual kingdom, under the spiritual rule of Jesus Christ—right now! However, we should live within the rules of our earthly country—so long as they don't oppose God's command to preach the Gospel and God's common-sense propriety of respecting human life (within the boundaries of God's morality). If our country opposes God, we must obey Him and take the consequences, knowing that God will reward us. *They commanded them not to speak or teach at all in Jesus' name. But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves. Which is right from God's point of view? Should we obey you? Or God? There's nothing else we can do. We have to speak about the things we've seen and heard."*<sup>Acts.4:18-20</sup> *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." 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. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*<sup>1Pet.3:14-17</sup>

Yes, we are **in the world** but not **of the world!** Even though we are still living amongst the world, we have different values from the world because our hearts have been changed. Our goal is to live a holy life that honours God, not only because we will have to give an account to Him for everything that we do but especially because **we love God and want to honour Him** by living respectfully and reverently: *While I was with them, I guarded them. I kept them safe through the name you gave me. None of them has been lost, except the one who was sentenced to be destroyed. It happened so that Scripture would come true. I am coming to you now. But I say these things while I am still in the world. I say them so that those you gave me can have all my joy inside them. I have given them your word. The world has hated them. This is because they are not part of the world any more than I am. I do not pray that you will take them out of the world. I pray that you will keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to it. Use the truth to make them holy. Your word is truth. You sent me into the world.*

*In the same way, I have sent them into the world. I make myself holy for them so that they too can be made holy in a true sense.*<sup>Jn.17:12-19</sup>

May God give us the wisdom to **give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and also give to God what belongs to God.**<sup>Mk.12:17</sup>

### **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2018. Ps.1. Mk.12:18-43**

**Until!** *David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand **until** I put your enemies under your feet."* [Take the highest position in heaven until I put your enemies under your control.]<sup>Mk.12:36</sup>

Last week we saw that **God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom** and runs parallel to the natural kingdoms of this earth—Jesus is seated on His throne in heaven not on earth! *People can't observe the coming of the kingdom of God. They can't say, 'Here it is!' or 'There it is!' You see, the kingdom of God is within you.*<sup>Lk.17:20-21</sup> *At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it... the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "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."*<sup>Rev.4:2-</sup>

<sup>11</sup> When people try to establish a "Christian" kingdom on earth they always fail because people cannot be forced to keep God's laws. God's kingdom is the rule of Christ in people's hearts—a personal submission to Christ. God's kingdom is not a rule that can be imposed. *But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good—crucified.*<sup>Gal.5:22-24</sup> People who attempt to establish an earthly kingdom for God misunderstand what sort of king Jesus is: *Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world."*<sup>Matt.18:36</sup> Jesus told us that He would **prepare a place for us and return to collect us,**<sup>Jn.14:1-4</sup> He did not tell us to prepare a place for Him to return to!

Although God's kingdom is already here, we are to pray: "*Your kingdom come*". Jesus explains what He means by this in the next phrase: *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*<sup>Matt.6:10</sup> **God's kingdom comes on earth when God's will is done on earth**—and God's will is **that none should perish:** *The Lord is... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*<sup>2Pet.3:9</sup>

**The Great Commission is our Mission,** which is to: *go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.*<sup>Matt.28:19-20</sup> This is the way we establish God's kingdom on earth.

Even though we cannot and should not attempt to establish a physical kingdom on earth for God, countries have a moral duty to protect their citizens from danger—especially the old, young, and vulnerable (including foreigners). And they also have a moral duty to promote good health—good physical, emotional and spiritual health, which is only respecting and valuing human life! Sadly, most of the Western countries have now negated their God-given responsibilities by supporting and promoting those who disrespect human life—this is seen in the rise of abortions and euthanasia, in the violent protests (usually against something that is wholesome!) and in the failing judicial system when criminals and terrorists forego justice because of their "human rights" but their victims are left damaged and despondent because of the injustice! In contrast, those same countries (and especially the media, both public and social) criticise and publicly oppose those who honour God and His kingdom. However, this is not

surprising as: *Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.*<sup>2Cor.4:4</sup> All mankind outside of Christ, are blind to God and by nature oppose Him—regardless of how moral or compassionate they are. *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... They don't know where to find peace. They have no fear of God at all.*<sup>Rom.3:10-17</sup>

When Jesus said the Kingdom of God is here, He meant that He was King of His kingdom and He had begun His reign—but not everyone recognises Jesus' authority. Because God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, only people who have been made alive spiritually have any spiritual goodness. Even though people may be kind or morally good, they are not spiritually good until they have received new life from God. Until people are born from above they cannot even see the kingdom of God.<sup>Jn.3:3</sup> But one day all this will change. One day the kingdom of God will be fully established and the whole world will recognise that Jesus is Lord (in control) and honour Him as God. *God lifted him up to the highest place. He gave him the name that is above every name. When the name of Jesus is spoken, everyone's knee will bow to worship him. Every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow to worship him. Everyone's mouth will say that Jesus Christ is Lord. And God the Father will receive the glory.*<sup>Phil.2:9-11</sup>

Jesus refers to two beginnings of new life into the kingdom of God. The **first** beginning is at **conversion**: *What I'm about to tell you is true. Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He will not be found guilty. He has crossed over from death to life. What I'm about to tell you is true. A time is coming for me to give life. In fact, it has already begun. The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. Those who hear it will live.*<sup>Jn.5:24-25</sup> The **second** is at the **final resurrection** *Do not be amazed at this. A time is coming when all who are in the grave will hear his voice. They will all come out of their graves. Those who have done good will rise and live again. Those who have done evil will rise and be found guilty.*<sup>Jn.5:28-29</sup> Those who are born again have received spiritual life and have nothing to fear from physical death: *Those who have ears should listen to what the Holy Spirit says to the churches. Those who overcome will not be hurt at all by the second death.*<sup>Rev.2:11</sup> *Blessed and holy are those who take part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them. They will be priests of God and of Christ. They will rule with him.*<sup>Rev.20:6</sup> *Blessed and holy are those who take part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them. They will be priests of God and of Christ. They will rule with him.*<sup>Rev.20:14</sup> So Jesus became human like them in order to die for them. By doing that, he could destroy the one who rules over the kingdom of death. I'm talking about the devil. Jesus could set people free who were afraid of death. All their lives they were held as slaves by that fear.<sup>Heb.2:14-15</sup>

Jesus is reigning as King of His domain but one day those who have refused to accept His authority and Kingship will be removed: *"The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever."* The twenty-four elders sitting on their thrones before God fell with their faces to the ground and worshiped him. And they said, *"We give thanks to you, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who always was, for now you have assumed your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were filled with wrath, but now the time of your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward your servants the prophets, as well as your holy people, and all who fear your name, from the least to the greatest. It is time to destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth."*<sup>Rev.11:15-18</sup> This completion of the Kingdom of God will happen when Jesus destroys death itself—after that, there will be no more dying, no more births and no more re-births or opportunities to make peace with God: *After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death.*<sup>1Cor.15:24-26</sup> *Listen! I am telling you a mystery. We will not all die. But we will all be changed. That will happen in a flash, as quickly as you can wink an eye. It will happen when the last trumpet sounds. The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised to live forever. And we will be changed. Our natural bodies*



don't last forever. They must be dressed with what does last forever. What dies must be dressed with what does not die. In fact, that is going to happen. What does not last will be dressed with what lasts forever. What dies will be dressed with what does not die. Then what is written will come true. It says, "Death has been swallowed up. It has lost the battle." "Death, where is the battle you thought you were winning? Death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin. And the power of sin is the law. But let us give thanks to God! He wins the battle for us because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done. My dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Don't let anything move you. Always give yourselves completely to the work of the Lord. Because you belong to the Lord, you know that your work is not worthless.<sup>1Cor.15:51-58</sup>

Yes, Jesus is King and He is reigning from heaven **UNTIL** that final Resurrection when He will bring every thing and every one to order. The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." [Take the highest position in heaven until I put your enemies under your control.]<sup>Mk.12:36</sup> **The question is: Are you ready?** Not just to avoid hell but to also to enjoy heaven? The journey starts now. **To be ready and willingly submit to Jesus' Kingship is to be really blessed**—Jesus said: *Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*<sup>Matt.25:34</sup>

## Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2018. Ps.2.

As Johan Westhuysen is with us today I have reprinted this article from Andrew Corbett

### Holy Relevant.

"**Holy**" seems to be the most precious word used to describe God. It is the only word emphasized three times to describe God: *Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*<sup>Is.6:3</sup> The Hebrews used this literary device to emphasize. If a word was used twice, such as "*Truly, truly...*", what was about to be said was very true. If a word was used three times it was absolute and ultimate. God is described not as being "*holy, holy*" but as "*holy, holy, holy*". *And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"*<sup>Rev.4:8</sup> The word "*holy*" means "*different*". But it's more than just obscure, it means *different* in the sense of "*not common*", "*very, very special*". As it pertains to God, the word *holy* carries a sense of beauty, magnificence, awesome. While God is *holy, holy, holy*, what is directly associated with Him is *holy*. Thus, God calls His redeemed people, *holy*. **To be a Christian is to be made holy**—we are called "saints". *To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be ["to be" is not in the Greek] to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours. [to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.]*<sup>1Cor.1:2</sup> Without being made holy, a person cannot see God let alone enter Heaven after this life: *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*<sup>Heb.12:14</sup> But, unlike God, whose intrinsic nature is holy, we who have come to realise our need for God, are holy by virtue of God's election of us. In this sense it is a new legal standing for us. It is an apt adjective of what Christ has done for us. **But we are also told to be holy.** *But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."*<sup>1Pet.1:15-16</sup> In this sense, holy is a verb for a believer—something we are required to do or be. *Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God.*<sup>2Cor.7:1</sup>

In the Book of Revelation, the word *holy* is used very strikingly. It is used in its absolute sense to describe God—"holy, holy, holy". *Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."*<sup>Rev.4:8</sup> But it is also used to describe the people that God had called to be holy, yet were not. *Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great amount of incense was given to him to mix*



*with the prayers of God's people as an offering on the gold altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of God's holy people, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out.*<sup>Rev.8:3-4</sup>

Initially in the Book of Revelation, Jerusalem is described as "*the holy city*". But then God laments that it was the city which had rejected His Son and become like Sodom and Egypt: *and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.*<sup>Rev.11:8</sup> So God calls a **New Jerusalem** into existence with the **New Covenant**. He then designates this **new people** (comprising of converted Jews and Gentiles) as **the holy city**. *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*<sup>Rev.21:2</sup>

The people who were called to be holy under the Old Covenant failed to transition to the New Covenant. Yet they went further than just missing it—they opposed it! The Book of Revelation describes them not just as "*Sodom and Egypt*"<sup>Rev.11:8</sup> but as "*Babylon*."<sup>Rev.14:8;16:19;17:5;18:2,10,21</sup> Their depiction as "*Babylon*" conjures up the memory of ancient Babylon which on several occasions had significant demonstrations of God's glory (read the Book of Daniel) but still maintained their idolatry and wickedness. To be described as "*Babylon*" was to be labelled as "*unholy*". The Book of Revelation describes their backslidden state in terms drinking wine, of lusting and immorality. *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."*<sup>Rev.14:8</sup> Revelation goes on to describe the people who were supposed to be holy as having "*prostituted*" themselves with the world. *And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations."*<sup>Rev.17:5</sup>

The modern application that we can draw from this chilling book is that **God is holy and He calls His people to be holy. To be called to holiness and to refuse to comply, is called wickedness** (which God takes a rather dim view of). But for some believers, holiness is about mere rule-keeping or looking good (denigrating Christianity into a programme). For them there is great effort involved. This effort sometimes leads to distinctions being made in their lives that takes them so far from the everyday reality of the people around them that they become irrelevant. There are other Christians who react to this form of legalism and regard holiness as something entirely derived from God and so there is nothing to be overly concerned about. For this group their concept of holiness is one that says they have been made holy by God and there is nothing they can add to that, so why not relax and enjoy the freedoms and liberties that God's grace has afforded them. This might include excessive drinking, smoking, casual church commitment, loose language, lurid entertainment. What the latter group accuse the former group (legalists) of doing, they themselves manage to commit just as successfully (albeit, unwittingly). This is because they are no longer different, distinct, mysterious, other-worldly. That is: **they are no longer living as if they are holy.**

The lessons of the **Book of Revelation** for today is that just as God wanted the Old Jerusalem in the world as a beacon of difference—a light to the world—**so He has called the New Jerusalem (the New Covenant Church) down from Heaven to be in the world but not like the world.** By living like Daniel lived in Babylon, we can be holy and relevant. This is one of the greatest applications from one of the greatest books in the Bible. *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*<sup>2Cor.7:1</sup>

*Dr. Andrew Corbett, Legana, Tasmania, February 2008*

## July

This poor man called out, and the LORD heard him. He saved him out of all of his troubles. Ps.34:6

### Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018. Ps.3.

#### Joshua the Servant, Spy and Successor

Last month we saw that the Bible is a great story book from God with a lot of wonderful stories about nearly everything. But the stories are not just **history** but they are **His Story—His Story of redemption!** *God has breathed life into all of Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, a man of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing.*<sup>2Tim.3:16-17</sup> And so the stories about Joshua are also about God's plan of Redemption because **Joshua is a type** (illustration) **of Jesus**. Actually **Joshua** and **Jesus** are the same word in Hebrew and mean **Saviour**: *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*<sup>Matt.1:21</sup> We saw that that the first mention of Joshua was at **Rephidim**, where the Israelites ran out of water but when Moses hit the rock there was enough water for everyone. *They camped at Rephidim. But there wasn't any water for the people to drink... Take in your hand the wooden staff you used when you struck the Nile River. Go. I will stand there in front of you by the rock at Mount Horeb. Hit the rock. Then water will come out of it for the people to drink."* So Moses hit the rock in the sight of the elders of Israel.<sup>Ex.17:1-6</sup> Paul states that this Rock represented Jesus. *They all drank the same supernatural water. They drank from the supernatural rock that went with them. That rock was Christ.*<sup>1Cor.10:4</sup> When Jesus died and returned to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to take His place and like the water that sustained life in the wilderness, the Holy Spirit sustains our life today by convicting us, converting us and comforting us, by encouraging, edifying and empowering us. *If I don't go away, the helper won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. He will come to convict the world of sin, to show the world what has God's approval, and to convince the world that God judges it. He will convict the world of sin, because people don't believe in me. He will show the world what has God's approval, because I'm going to the Father and you won't see me anymore. He will convince the world that God judges it, because the ruler of this world has been judged.*<sup>Jn.16:7-11</sup> *I am going to send you what my Father has promised. But for now, stay in the city. Stay there until you have received power from heaven.*<sup>Lk.24:9</sup>

This month we are looking at **Joshua the Servant, Spy and Successor**. Joshua had an important work to do—he was going to lead the Israelites into the Promised land. When David went to fight Goliath, he was offered Saul's armour but David declined because he was untrained. Instead, David used what was already tried and tested—his sling! Joshua was going to be trained so he could succeed Moses and lead the Israelites into the Promised land. God trained Joshua through difficult experiences so when the time for him to fulfil his calling, Joshua was thoroughly tested—and able! (Actually, our training is integral to God's purposes and not just a means to an end.)

**Joshua the Servant:** The first qualification of a leader in God's kingdom is to be a servant. Joshua was Moses' servant. *Joshua son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his choice young men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!"*<sup>2Nu.11:28</sup> When God poured out His Spirit on the 70 Elders, 2 other people also prophesied and because they weren't trained or recognised as leaders, Joshua was afraid the things might get out of hand—but they were already out of hand because most of the people were not really "believers" anyway! Moses' response was: if only ALL the people were true believers and ALL had the Holy Spirit: *But Moses asked him, "Do you think you need to stand up for me? I wish all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them."*<sup>2Nu.11:29</sup>

Last week Johan spoke about our Church "Fire Policy" and spiritualised it by telling us to shout "Fire" and then GO to tell others about the Gospel. John the Baptist prophesied: *John answered*

them all, "I baptize you with water. But One who is more powerful than I am will come. I'm not good enough to untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."<sup>Lk.3:16</sup> But unlike a physical fire, we must be careful not to quench the fire of the Holy Spirit. *Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Give thanks no matter what happens. God wants you to thank him because you believe in Christ Jesus. Don't put out the Holy Spirit's fire. Don't treat prophecies as if they amount to nothing. Put everything to the test. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil.*<sup>1Thess.5:16-22</sup> Joshua had to learn that being a Servant means submitting to God's sovereignty. As Augustine said: "Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you" (maybe we should do it the other way: Pray as though everything depended on us and work as though everything depended on God)!!!

**Joshua the Spy:** To be effective in God's kingdom we must not only be a true servant but we must also be able to see life from God's perspective. *Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land."*<sup>Nu.13:7-20</sup> That is why we must be filled with the Holy Spirit because that is His ministry. *Elisha prayed, "LORD, open my servant's eyes so he can see." Then the LORD opened his eyes. He looked up and saw the hills. He saw that Elisha was surrounded by horses and chariots. Fire was all around them.*<sup>2Kgs.6:17</sup> "You say, 'Four months more, and then it will be harvest time.' But I tell you, open your eyes! Look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest right now. Those who gather the crop are already getting paid. They are already harvesting the crop for eternal life. So those who plant and those who gather can now be glad together."<sup>Jn.4:25-36</sup> I am sending you to them to open their eyes. I want you to turn them from darkness to light. I want you to turn them from Satan's power to God. I want their sins to be forgiven. They will be forgiven when they believe in me. They will have their place among God's people.<sup>Acts.26:18</sup> 12 spies went into the Promised Land and they all saw the same things and reported back the facts: *They gave Moses their report. They said, "We went into the land you sent us to. It really does have plenty of milk and honey! Here's some fruit from the land. But the people who live there are powerful. Their cities have high walls around them and are very large."*<sup>Nu.13:27-28</sup> However, 10 said: "We can't attack those people. They are stronger than we are." *The men spread a bad report about the land among the people of Israel. They said, "The land we checked out destroys those who live in it. All of the people we saw there are very big and tall. We saw the Nephilim there. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes. And that's also how we seemed to them."*<sup>Nu.13:31-33</sup> But Caleb and Joshua said: "We passed through the land and checked it out. It's very good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he'll lead us into that land. It's a land that has plenty of milk and honey. He'll give it to us. "But don't refuse to obey him. And don't be afraid of the people of the land. We will swallow them up. The LORD is with us. So nothing can save them. Don't be afraid of them."<sup>Nu.14:7-9</sup> Although they all reported the same facts, they responded differently—10 with fear and 2 with faith! How do you see the future—doom and gloom or brightness and lightness? We don't need to live in gloom anymore: *Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress... The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest.*<sup>Is.9:1-3</sup> God has not promised us a trouble-free life but He has promised us a blessed life but if we treat our redeemed life as full of insurmountable problems, we are no different from those Israelites of whom God said: *How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?*<sup>2Nu.14:11</sup>

**Joshua the Successor:** At the right time, Joshua succeeded Moses because he had been trained, tried and tested: *Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous... The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."*<sup>Deut.31:7-8</sup> Moses never made it into the Promised Land because he broke the type or the example of Jesus by hitting the Rock again instead of speaking to it



the second time. *The LORD spoke to Moses. He said, "Get your wooden staff. You and your brother Aaron gather the people together. Then speak to that rock while everyone is watching. It will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community. Then they and their livestock can drink it."* Moses said to them, *"Listen, you who refuse to obey! Do we have to bring water out of this rock for you?"* Then Moses raised his arm. *He hit the rock twice with his staff. Water poured out. And the people and their livestock drank it. But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said, "You did not trust in me enough to honour me. You did not honour me as the holy God in front of the people of Israel. So you will not bring this community into the land I am giving them."*<sup>Nu.20:7-12</sup>

Joshua is an example to show us how to live victoriously by overcoming every struggle through simple and confident trust in God. When we are servants, filled with the Holy Spirit and seeing life from God's perspective we will be ready to do what God tell us because we know that *God is with us; that he will never leave us nor forsake us.* Then *we will not be afraid or discouraged,*<sup>Deut.31:7-8</sup> whatever our circumstances!

Moses was the Prophet that led the people out of slavery, but Joshua was the Saviour who led the people into the Promised Land. Jesus fulfils both of these roles—He delivers us out of our life of sin and He leads us into God's land of Promise giving us victory in this life (in spite of all its difficulties) and then ultimately into heaven as well!

### **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018. Ps.4. Mark 13**

In previous weeks we have stated that the Bible is a great Book with many different styles of writing—including prose, poetry, parable, prophesy, but all of the Bible was written for one purpose: **to reveal God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.** *You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. These Scriptures are all about me!*<sup>Jn.5:39</sup>

Although we believe that the entire Bible is true, not everything in the Bible is a literal account of events—either past or present. There are some parts of the Bible that are allegories and these explain what something is like (for instance, *the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that a man planted...*<sup>Matt.13:21</sup> *These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.*<sup>Gal.4:24</sup>).

Some parts of the Bible are prophecy and these describe events that were yet to come. Prophecies often use pictures or symbols and although the original readers would have understood their significance, their meaning can often be lost today because our culture, language and colloquialisms have changed. However, when the events prophesied eventually unfold, they are easily identified (e.g. Joel 2 and Acts 2—*this is that*), even though often some of the descriptions used turn out to be symbolic rather than literal. It is usually obvious from the context and from their colloquial use, whether those prophetic descriptions were (or are) literal or symbolic, so with sensible study we can distinguish between the real and representative, between actual and allegory. If the descriptions are symbolic, there will be other passages of Scripture that also use them symbolically.

The challenge for us today is to interpret what the symbols in the passages of Scripture actually mean. We can do this by following the standard rules for sound Bible interpretation: **Interpret within the context of a passage; Interpret within the overall message of Scripture** (an interpretation of a verse which contradicts the overall message of Scripture is faulty); **Interpret Scripture with Scripture** (where the Scripture has already interpreted itself or another passage); **Interpret Scripture as being intentional** (the Author had a clear intention for what He was communicating, which means that there is one interpretation but many applications). So, the principle for determining the symbolism within the Bible (and especially prophesy) is



firstly to examine its context. For example, depending on its context, “leaven” can be regarded as either a good or a bad thing in Scripture.<sup>Matt.13:33;Matt16:6</sup> “Darkness” is either an attribute or God<sup>Gen.15:12</sup> or satan<sup>Matt.8:12</sup> depending on the context. We don’t need a theological degree to determine this—a basic, broad knowledge of Scripture is sufficient! For instance, in the Bible, “west” represents God’s Presence and “east” represents the world. Abraham pitched his tent between Bethel (House of God) and Ai (heap of ruins: *Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day.*<sup>Josh.8:28</sup>): *Abram went on toward the hills east of Bethel. He set up his tent there. Bethel was to the west, and Ai was to the east. Abram built an altar there and worshiped the LORD.*<sup>Gen.12:8</sup> The entrance to the Tabernacle (and later the Temple), was always in the east, so worshippers face west when they came to God. Ezekiel saw God’s glory depart through the East Gate<sup>Ezek.11:23</sup> and returned through the East Gate.<sup>Ezek.43:2-4</sup> When it comes to “end-times” prophesy in the Bible, there is no need for us Christians to use guesswork or go into “the realms of fantasy” because there are no “hidden messages” in the Bible and no “secret information” available only to the elite or “spiritual” people—that is what the Gnostics taught. Gnosticism (from *gnosis* meaning knowledge) originated in the first century AD and held that the material world is created by an emanation of the highest God, trapping the divine spark within the human body. This divine spark could be liberated by *gnosis* (special knowledge). Some of their core teachings include the following: All matter is evil, and the non-material, spirit-realm is good. There is an unknowable God, who gave rise to many lesser spirit beings called *Aeons*. One evil, lower spirit-being is the creator who made the universe. Gnosticism does not deal with 'sin', only ignorance. To achieve salvation, one needs to get in touch with secret knowledge. And there are there still forms of Gnostics around today that peddle the same heresies—and like most heresies, parts of them eventually become absorbed into traditional Christianity: *asceticism*—punishing the body in order to become spiritual; “a little bit of good in each of us” we just need to release it; *denying Jesus is the eternal Word* through whom all things were created. **But the antidote to all heresy is the simple Gospel of Jesus and His love.** Although the Gospel is so simple that even a child can accept it, it is not simplistic because the Gospel is also so profound that it will save all who accept it.

The New Covenant era began when Jesus rose from the dead, but the Old Covenant rituals and paraphernalia remained for another 40 years until 70AD when the Temple was destroyed—Mark 13 is a prophesy that describes these events. Even a casual glance at this passage shows that it is not about the coming of the Lord to end the world at the final Resurrection but **the coming of the Lord to end the Old Covenant era.** *Jesus replied, "Yes, look at these great buildings. But they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!" Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the Temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him privately and asked him, "Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled?" Jesus replied, "Don't let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah.' They will deceive many... I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene before all these things take place.*<sup>Mk.13:2-6;30</sup> The Roman legions besieged Jerusalem in 67AD and over next 3 years squeezed the life out of the city. By 70AD the Romans had breached Jerusalem's outer walls and began a systematic ransacking of the city, culminating in the burning and destruction of the Temple. In victory, they slaughtered thousands of Jews and of those spared from death, thousands more were enslaved to work the mines of Egypt whilst other were dispersed to arenas throughout the Empire to be butchered for the amusement of the public. Josephus was a former leader of the Jewish Revolt who defected to the Romans and was granted Roman citizenship. He became an advisor and friend of Vespasian's son Titus, serving as his translator when he led the Siege of Jerusalem. Below is part of Josephus’ account of the siege: *Most of the slain were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, and they were butchered where they were caught. The heap of*

corpses mounted higher and higher about the altar; a stream of blood flowed down the Temple's steps, and the bodies of those slain at the top slipped to the bottom. The Temple Mount, everywhere enveloped in flames, seemed to be boiling over from its base; yet the blood seemed more abundant than the flames and the numbers of the slain greater than those of the slayers. The soldiers climbed over heaps of bodies as they chased the fugitives." Jesus prophesied about this time: *Those days will be worse than any others from the time God created the world until now. And there will never be any like them again. If the Lord had not cut the time short, no one would live. But because of God's chosen people, he has shortened it.*<sup>Mk.13:19-20</sup>

So, if this passage has already been fulfilled, what can we learn from it? We have already said that there is one interpretation of a Bible passage but there are many applications, and so although Mark 13 has already been fulfilled, there is an application of this passage for us today. Just as Jesus spoke of judgement coming on the rebellious people who rejected Him when they crucified Him, so He also spoke of judgment coming on all the rebellious people who rejected Him throughout history. This will be fulfilled at the end of this New Covenant era when Jesus returns. **The return of Jesus to reign in glory is fundamental to Christianity** and is what we hold dear: **Jesus—Saviour, Healer, Baptist and Coming King. So the application for us is to be alert and stay watchful:** *Keep watch! Stay awake! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away. He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge. Each one is given a task to do. He tells the one at the door to keep watch. So keep watch! You do not know when the owner of the house will come back. It may be in the evening or at midnight. It may be when the rooster crows or at dawn. He may come suddenly. So do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone. Watch!*<sup>Mk.13:33-37</sup>

**We should be alert and stay watchful by prayer** using our knowledge of salvation and Scriptures: *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*<sup>Eph.6:17-18</sup>

**And we should be alert and stay watchful by keeping a clear mind** so we utilise our faith and live a holy (God-honouring) life because Jesus is coming soon: *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.*<sup>1Pet.5:8-9</sup> *Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*<sup>1Pet.1:13-16</sup>

Rather than becoming "doom and gloom" people who regard future with fear and trepidation, let's take Jesus seriously who said we should *take heart! I have overcome the world.*<sup>Jn.16:33</sup> **Our future is glorious—no more gloom... we have seen a great light!**<sup>Is.9:1-2</sup>

*To help us understand some of the symbols used in Scripture, here is a glossary of terms used in prophecy.*

## **Glossary of Revelation**

There is a logical divide in **Revelation** after **chapter 19** where a thousand-year gap is described. We understand 1,000 years to mean a long time. This means that the first 19 chapters had an imminent application to the original audience in early 64 AD (when Revelation was probably written) and the events described from Revelation 20 to the end pertain to events to take place after "a long time".

**Angel:** Messenger, whether earthly or heavenly. Since the first three chapters of Revelation describe an angel overseeing each of the seven churches having a letter written to them, we logically understand these "angelos" to be human. When angels are flying in heaven they are obviously heavenly rather than earthly.

**Armageddon:** Armageddon, a literal place, the place of God's judgment

**Beast:** Ruler. In Rev. 13 there are two beasts mentioned. The first is "from across the sea" which

is a citation from Daniel 7:3, and then refers to the Roman Ruler as prophesied in Daniel 7. At the time of writing Revelation this was Nero. The second Beast of Rev. 13 is "*from the Land*" (13:11) this refers to the **High Priest, the Anti-Christ.**

**Bound:** Restriction. Satan was bound (restricted) with the close of the Old Covenant

**Camp of the Saints, the Beloved City:** The Church, the beloved city in contrast to "*Sodom, Egypt, Babylon*"

**Coming:** Judgment. The expression "*the Lord is coming*" is a warning of God's impending judgment, not the physical return of Christ.

**Door opened in heaven:** Spiritual, not physical but a revelation into the Heavenly realm

**Dragon:** Satan

**Elders:** Covenant Leaders. There are Twenty Four elders which is 12 elders from the Old Covenant (the Tribal Patriarchs) and 12 from the New (Apostles). [*Edersheim suggests the 24 Elders correspond to the 24 courses of Priests that served in the Temple, and so the 24 Elders represent all Believers, i.e. the "kingdom of Priests" (P.S.F.)*]

**Eyes:** Knowledge. God is described as having "*seven (complete) eyes*" which means He has omniscience

**False Prophet:** Judaism. They spoke against Christ, against His servants and against His message.

**Fire:** Judgment.

**Gog and Magog:** Opposition, a reference to the times in which Esther lived when Haman orchestrated socio-political opposition to God's people.

**Harlot (Prostitute):** Jerusalem. A promiscuous woman, therefore it depicts unfaithful Israel.

**Heaven and Earth:** Covenantal Order, the relationship between God and man. The Old Covenant has passed away thus fulfilling the words of Christ in Matt.5:18. One day even the New Covenant will be superseded by ultimate perfection, as described in Rev.21:1. This may also coincide with a literal new heaven and earth called the New Jerusalem.

**Heaven opened:** Revelation. A revelation into the Heavenly realm.

**Horns:** Might. God is described as having "*seven horns*", i.e., He is Almighty.

**Horse riders:** Emperors of Rome, commencing with Augustus the first Emperor of Rome.

**Kings:** Kings of Rome, starting with Julius Caesar the first king of Rome

**Lake of Fire:** "*Hell*" into which Hades (the place of the wicked dead) will be cast.

**Lamb:** The Lord Jesus Christ, the Pascal, sacrificial Provision of God.

**Lampstands, candlesticks:** Christ, the light of the world and thereby those who are connected to Christ as His Church.

**Man Child:** Christ.

**Mark:** A display of loyalty and submission. God's mark is on those who are His (Rev.7:3; 22:4), and the Enemy's mark is on those who have rejected God. The "*mark of the beast*" was the sign of allegiance to Judaism called "*phylacteries*."

**New Jerusalem:** The dwelling place of God with man.

**Scroll:** The Decrees of God, the "*Small Scroll*" (10:2) in particular refers to the Book of Daniel (note how it was "*sealed up*" in Dan.8:26).

**Across the Sea:** Gentile. Since '*sea*' is not of '*The Land*', in reference to Rev.13 it specifically refers to Rome.

**Seal:** Royal decrees.

**Seven Mountains (Hills): Jerusalem.** The City of Jerusalem as it existed in the time of Christ Jesus was widely reckoned to be the "*City of Seven Hills*."

**Sodom:** Jerusalem. Also referred to as "*Egypt, where they crucified their Lord*" (Rev.11:8). The place of sin.

**Soon, shortly, this hour:** Soon, not two thousand years or so to come, but within the lifetime of the original audience.

**The Bride:** The Church.

**The Land (or "earth"):** Palestine, the Promised Land. Greek word, "ge" from where we get the word "geology".

**Trumpets:** Announcement of God's looming arrival and intervention.

**Two Witnesses:** The two houses of Israel: Ephraim and Judah, probably represented at least by James the brother of Christ from Judah.

**White:** Righteous.

**White robes:** Heavenly bodies for the redeemed which precede resurrected bodies (note Rev.6:11).

**Woman:** Israel, also identified as having the Sun, Moon and Stars which is an echo of Joseph's dream of Israel in Genesis 37.

**Numbers:**

1 = Absolute, "one God"

2 = unity, "two witnesses"

3 = ultimate, "holy, holy, holy"

4 = earth, "four corners/winds of the earth"

5 = grace

6 = sin/man

7 = complete, ending

10 = human government "Ten kings"

12 = redemption

13 = evil

**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".

**1000** = large number, when linked with years = long time, equates to "the Kingdom of God".

**144,000** = 12,000 (12 x 1,000 = many redeemed) from 12 tribes (the redeemed)

**Man of Lawlessness: the High Priest.** An ironic title for someone who was meant to uphold the Law. Consider that this character is associated with the Temple (2Thess.2:4), upholds monotheism, opposes the true God (Christ) and exalts himself over God (something he did when he condemned Christ). *2Thess.1* refers to events yet-future, *2Thess.2* refers to events which would take place within the lifetime of the author.

**Anti-Christ: The Jewish High Priest.** The term "Anti-Christ" does not appear anywhere in Revelation! Although the Anti-Christ was a historical character (the Jewish High Priest), John refers to the spirit of antichrist which was at work in his day. Since this spirit is one which opposes and defies Christ we can say that there is, and always has been, a spirit of antichrist at work in the world. The Reformers of the C16<sup>th</sup> saw sharp parallels between the apparent evils of an apostate religious group, as described in the Revelation, and the Church of Rome and declared that the Pope was the Anti-Christ, and the Roman Church was the Harlot of Babylon (see the *Westminster Confession of Faith*). Many believe that this attack on the Roman Catholic Church, known as *Historicism*, was strategically countered by a Jesuit, *Francisco Ribera* (1537–1591). He deflected some of this attack by developing the *Futurist* eschatological system. He published a book in 1591, in which he claimed that the Anti-Christ, the Fall of Babylon, and the destruction of a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem would all take place in the final seven years before the commencement of the millennium. Out of the seeds of Futurism grew the teaching of *Edward Irving*. Edward Irving (1792–1834) was also influenced by the writings of another Jesuit Priest, *Emmanuel Lacunza* (who used the pseudonym Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra) who wrote a book, 'The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty'. Irving translated this Spanish book into English and added a 203 page Preface. The seeds of Dispensationalism which Irving planted, greatly influenced *John Nelson Darby* (1800-1882), an Anglican minister who left the Church of Ireland to commence the Plymouth Brethren and *Henry Drummond* (1786-1860), a banker, who founded the Catholic Apostolic Church. In 1831 both Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby began to postulate



a two- staged return of Christ. Some believe that Irving was influenced by a young girl, *Margaret McDonald*, who apparently received this ‘revelation’ from the Lord of a “rapture” of the Church before a time of Great Tribulation at the end of the age. *1Thess.4:17* refers to Resurrection, not Rapture!

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## Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2018. Ps.4. Mark 14:1-31

**True Worship:** *She has done a beautiful thing to me... She did what she could.*<sup>Mk.14:6-8</sup>

**True Worship:** *She has done a beautiful thing to me... She did what she could.*<sup>Mk.14:6-8</sup>

The story of Mary kissing Jesus’ feet and pouring perfume on His head would be embarrassing if it were to happen today to one of us or by one of us. But with hindsight we know that this was an act of worship not an emotional outburst. We often forget that we are spirit-beings with a personality and live in a body—we are not just physical (even with a personality). There is an unseen dimension to us—an eternal dimension—that will always be dysfunctional until it is re-united with its Creator. And when we are re-united with our Creator, we naturally want to express our appreciation, gratitude, awe, praise and honour—we call this worship.

**Worship is obedience**—it is not singing songs (although it can involve singing). When God told Abraham to offer up his son Isaac, he saw it as an act of worship and obeyed—and God accepted Abraham’s worship: *He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”*<sup>Gen.22:5</sup> *Because you have obeyed me... I swear by my own name that I will certainly bless you.*<sup>Gen.22:16-17</sup> When Mary took the expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus, she was expressing her worship in a very open and demonstrative way: *Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over his head.*<sup>Mk.14:3</sup> And from this story, we can extract some of the main elements of Worship.

**Worship is enjoyable.** God savours and appreciates worship like beautiful and expensive perfume. Jesus says that when we pray we should start with: *Our Father in heaven, may Your Name be honoured.* By setting this as our model, Jesus was teaching us that before we pray we should praise, before we ask we should appreciate. God’s Name is good and has a beautiful aroma: *A good name is better than fine perfume.*<sup>Ecd.7:1</sup> *Your name is like perfume that is poured out.*<sup>S.ofS.1:3</sup> Because we have the Name of Christ and we use His Name, we also share the aroma of His Name—for some it’s the smell of life and to others it’s the smell of death: *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. 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.*<sup>2Cor.2:14-16</sup> And when we pray, our prayers are like a perfume before God: *Accept my prayer as incense offered to you, and my upraised hands as an evening offering.*<sup>Ps.141:2</sup> *The twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. And they sang a new song.*<sup>Rev.5:8-9</sup> **But not only does God enjoy worship, we too should enjoy worship.** *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,*<sup>Is.61:10</sup> *To worship God is to love God: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out.*<sup>S.ofS.1:2-3</sup>

**Worship is emotional:** *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.*<sup>Jn.12:3</sup> The spiritual dimension is distinct from the natural dimension. Our bodies will die and everything in this world will pass away, but the spiritual dimension is an eternal dimension. We worship God from our spirit because: *God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.*<sup>Jn.4:24</sup> But we are not 2 people living 1 body—

we are not schizophrenics. Our soul is as much a part of us as our spirit is and both have emotions but it is often it is difficult to tell them apart because our soul (personality) and our spirit are so closely intertwined that only the Word of God can divide them: *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*<sup>Heb.4:12</sup> So when we worship God our spirit and soul emotions (feelings) are involved. *Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.* *This is the most important, the first on any list.*<sup>Matt.22:37-38</sup> The Holy Spirit produces these characteristics in Believers: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*<sup>Gal.5:22-23</sup> and so it is logical to expect these characteristics to be evident in our worship. Worship never focuses on our past but our present—we are redeemed, we are forgiven, we are righteous—and so, *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.*<sup>Heb.4:16</sup> But what is within us will manifest and at the very least our worship should be happy!

**Worship is expressive:** *It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.*<sup>Mk.14:4-5</sup> The Gospel is completely free—you cannot buy anything from God with something that belongs to Him, and this world and everything in it is God's! And there are strong warnings about trying to buy from God: *May your money be destroyed with you! Do you think you can buy God's gift with money? You have no part or share in this holy work. Your heart is not right with God. Turn away from this evil sin of yours. Pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. I see that you are very bitter. You are a prisoner of sin.*<sup>Acts.8:20-23</sup> But the Gospel is costly—it will cost you your life: Jesus said: *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.*<sup>Matt.10:37-38</sup> Then he said to the crowd, *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, 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 are yourself lost or destroyed? 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.*<sup>Lk.9:23-26</sup> Worship is our expression of what God is worth to us (our word *worship* is from OE *weorpscipe* meaning *worth-ship*). Jesus said that if we have been forgiven much, we will love much: *I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.*<sup>Lk.7:47</sup> Although worship may appear extreme because we put a lot of our time, effort and assets (including money) into worship, we can never repay our debt to God or truly show our appreciation to Him for saving us and loving us.

**Worship is expansive:** *And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*<sup>Jn.12:3</sup> God's glory always expands to fill up where ever it is manifested: *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD who rules over all. The whole earth is full of his glory." The sound of their voices caused the stone doorframe to shake. The temple was filled with smoke.*<sup>Is.6:3-4</sup> *The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD. The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.*<sup>Ex.10:4-5</sup> *An angel from the Lord suddenly appeared to them. The glory of the Lord filled the area with light.*<sup>Lk.2:9</sup> When we worship God, we connect with God's glory because we touch the very throne of God. And so our worship becomes "infected" with God's glory and its effect spreads out and affects those around like the fragrance of perfume. But worship is not limited to Church or to our "devotionals" because worship is lifestyle and it affect every part of our life. The Bible translates the word "*abad*" as *work* and also *worship*: *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work (abad) it and take care of it.*<sup>Gen2:15</sup> *I am the LORD your God. Worship me. Then I will bless your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you.*<sup>Ex.23:25</sup>

For the Believer, every part of our life is an act of worship and there can be no sacred/secular divide. *On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be carved on the bells of the horses. The cooking pots in the LORD's temple will be just like the sacred bowls in front of the altar for burnt offerings. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be set apart to the LORD.*<sup>Zech.14:20-21</sup> Our whole life is dedicated to God and His kingdom: *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*<sup>1Cor.10:31</sup> *And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father... Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*<sup>Col.3:17;23</sup> But just because worship affects every part of our life (including our emotions), it doesn't mean that life will be smooth—worship will cause a reaction in those who live as enemies of God and the cross: *Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.*<sup>Mk.14:4-5</sup>

So don't worry unduly about criticism of our relationship with God, instead, keep focused on the eternal dimension. *For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Saviour.*<sup>Phil.3:18-20</sup> **Then we will hear Jesus say:** *You have done a beautiful thing to me... You did what you could.*<sup>Mk.14:6-8</sup>

Yes, true worship is enjoyable, emotional, expressive, and expansive and it affects every part of our life and sets us apart from non-Believers. *But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter. "It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship."*<sup>Jn.4:23</sup>

## **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2018. Ps.6. Mark 14:32-72**

**Abba Father:** *Jesus prayed: Abba, Father, everything is possible for you... Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.*<sup>Mk.14:36</sup>

Prayer is how we describe our communication with God and until Jesus came, any communication with God was so prescribed and so holy that for most people prayer was impersonal. God's Name was so holy that the Jews were even afraid to try to pronounce it. But when Jesus came, He taught His Disciples to pray like this: *Our Father in heaven, may your name be honoured. May your kingdom come. May what you want to happen be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we also have forgiven those who sin against us. Keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted. Save us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*<sup>Matt.6:9-13</sup> God could now be addressed personally, not just as Deity but as Father. We can call God our Father because we are re-born into His Family: *He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.*<sup>Jn.1:10-13</sup> *And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."*<sup>Gal.4:6</sup> After Jesus rose from the dead, He said to Mary, *"Don't cling to me, for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*<sup>Jn.20:17</sup> Although there have always been people who had a personal relationship with God that was both intimate and reverent, before Jesus came, people had to follow the prescribed rituals for communicating with God, keeping themselves ritualistically clean and coming to Him through a priest as their mediator. But when Jesus introduced the New Covenant, prayer changed from a formal, ritualistic communication, to a family relational

communication and is far superior than the Old Covenant—because this Covenant actually works! *But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.*<sup>Heb.8:6</sup>

The Living Word of God (Jesus) and the Written Word of God (Bible) are both are essential to prayer. We pray in the Name of Jesus because He is our Mediator—the One who is between us and God: *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.*<sup>1Tim.2:5-6</sup> But the only true and reliable record we have of Jesus is the Bible and so we must pray according to the principles found in the Bible—and especially the teachings about the New Covenant: *Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them.*<sup>Heb.9:14-15</sup> Mme Guyon (a C17<sup>th</sup> French Christian) wrote: *After you have been meditating in the Word and praying it out to God for some time, you will gradually find how easy it is to come into His presence. You will remember other Scriptures with less difficulty. Prayer has now become easy, sweet, and delightful.*<sup>Mme Guyon</sup>

When we pray, our prayers do not inform God of our situation or needs because He already knows them—God is Omniscient. God knows what we will say before we actually speak and He even knows our thoughts: *O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD.*<sup>Ps.139:1-4</sup> God also knows what we need before we ask Him. *When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!*<sup>Matt.6:7-8</sup> Before we pray, God has already prepared the answer: *I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!*<sup>Is.65:24</sup> But God can only know what we will pray if we actually do pray—He doesn't know what we don't pray because that doesn't exist! So, although God already knows what we need and what we will pray, we must still pray in order for God to answer our prayers—and He does answer our prayers!!!. However, we must pray with the right motives—which are to seek and promote God's Kingdom, not our kingdom or even pleasure: *Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.*<sup>Jas.4:2-3</sup> And when we pray, our focus should be on the answer not the problem. Ruth Heflin said: *You can't praise very long without entering into victory. 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 ..."*<sup>Psalms 100:4</sup>

When the Israelites left Egypt, God gave them clear instructions for worship—how, why and where: *Your pattern of worship will change. Today all of you are doing as you please, because you have not yet arrived at the place of rest, the land the LORD your God is giving you as your special possession. But you will soon cross the Jordan River and live in the land the LORD your God is giving you. When he gives you rest from all your enemies and you're living safely in the land, you must bring everything I command you—your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, your sacred offerings, and your offerings to fulfil a vow—to the designated place of worship, the place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honored.*<sup>Deut.12:8-11</sup> That place was Jerusalem: *I praise the LORD. He is the God of Israel... He said, 'I have chosen Jerusalem. I will put my Name there. And I have chosen David to rule over my people Israel.'*<sup>2Chron.6:4-6</sup> And when Solomon dedicated the Temple there, he prayed: *But will God really live on earth among people? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built! Nevertheless, listen to my prayer and my plea, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is making to you. May you*



watch over this Temple day and night, this place where you have said you would put your name. May you always hear the prayers I make toward this place. May you hear the humble and earnest requests from me and your people Israel when we pray toward this place. Yes, hear us from heaven where you live, and when you hear, forgive.<sup>2Chron.6:18-21</sup> God said that under the Old Covenant He would always hear their prayers when they prayed in the Temple at Jerusalem because the Temple was to be a House of Prayer: *I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices, because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*<sup>Is.56:7</sup> However, when Jesus came, He explained that the Temple represented His body: *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. "What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?" But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.*<sup>Jn.2:19-22</sup> And now under the New Covenant, **our body is God's Temple—WE are the place where God dwells and WE are the House of Prayer.** *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.*<sup>1Cor.6:19-20</sup> We no longer meet with God by going on pilgrimages, by repeating religious rituals or observing special festivals. God comes to us and lives 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."*<sup>Jn.14:23</sup> God fellowships with 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."*<sup>2Cor.6:16</sup> The sacrifices we now 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.*<sup>Heb.13:15</sup> *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.*<sup>1Pet.2:5</sup> *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.*<sup>Rom.12:1</sup> Because we are God's children, He has established us into His family: *A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.*<sup>Ps.66:5-6</sup> So when we pray, we address God as **our Father**—just like Jesus taught us—and know that we are secure in His care. And just as a young child submits to their father's instructions and desires, so we too submit to our heavenly Father's instructions and desires—and these are not hard or burdensome: *For this is the love of God: that we keep his commandments. And his commandments do not weigh us down, because everyone who has been fathered by God conquers the world.*<sup>Jn.5:3-4</sup> So let's continue to pray to God as **our Father** and like Jesus, yield to His sovereignty, preferring His will over ours: *Abba, Father, everything is possible for you... Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.*<sup>Mk.14:36</sup>

## **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2018. Ps.9. Mark 15**

**Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.** *You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*<sup>Jn.18:37</sup>

Over the last few weeks we have seen that although the Bible is a library of books written over hundreds (and possibly thousands) of years, there is a common theme throughout the whole Bible that is clear and concise from beginning to end—from Genesis to Revelation. Actually, it is much more than a theme—it is the very purpose of the Bible which is: **God's plan of redemption for mankind through Jesus Christ.** After God created the world, He created man in His own image and placed him on the earth to have dominion over it, to rule over it and to use it for his benefit (but not abuse it!). Man's dominion was to be within the parameters that God had set out, which was living God's way—we call it **obedience!** But Adam did it his way—we call it **disobedience!** The result was that Adam died spiritually, which separated him,

and all his descendants, from God. However, God straightaway explained His plan of Redemption for mankind. For man to be redeemed, he needs a Redeemer who is Righteous. Only God is truly Righteous and in order to reconcile man to God and restore him to God's standard of holiness and righteousness, God would need to come down to man's level. God foretold this when He said that Eve's Seed would crush the devil: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*<sup>Gen.3:15</sup> We call this first mention of the Gospel, the *proto-evangelium*.

In order to redeem us, God had to become like us: *[Jesus] was made a little lower than the angels. He suffered death. By the grace of God, he tasted death for everyone. That is why he was given his crown. 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.*<sup>Heb.2:9-11</sup> However, God did not change into a man, but rather, He added a human nature to His divine nature in the man Jesus. *In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God... So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.*<sup>Jn.1:1-2;14</sup> So Jesus is one Person with two natures—undiminished deity and true humanity—and we call this unique merging of the Divine nature with a human nature, the “*hypostatic union*.” *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.*<sup>Phil.2:6-11</sup>

God prepared the world for the Word to become human (*Incarnation*) by having the right people at the right place, at the right time—and especially having the right woman to be Jesus' mother: *But when the right time came, God sent his Son into the world. A woman gave birth to him, and he came under the control of God's laws. God sent him to pay for the freedom of those who were controlled by these laws so that we would be adopted as his children. Because you are God's children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into us to call out, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer slaves but God's children. Since you are God's children, God has also made you heirs.*<sup>Gal.4:4-7</sup> God also prepared the world through prophecy, and that first prophecy of the Redeemer given at the beginning, was followed by many others—each one adding more details so when Jesus was born it was clear that He was the Redeemer. These prophecies of the Redeemer included His lineage (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah... David); the place of His birth (Bethlehem); the place of His up-bringing (Egypt and then Galilee); details of His ministry, betrayal, death and resurrection; and even the date of His Ministry: *Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’*<sup>Dan.8:25</sup> Accepting that a “*week*” was seven years and the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was given around 455 B.C., then the Messiah would appear after 483 year (69 x 7)—around 25AD—the time Jesus began His ministry! Note that the next 2 verses refer to Jesus death followed by the destruction of the Temple (which would end offerings and animal sacrifices): *After the 62 ‘weeks,’ the Anointed King will be cut off. His followers will desert him. And everything he has will be taken away from him. The army of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the temple. The end will come like a flood. War will continue until the end. The LORD has ordered that many places be destroyed. A covenant will be put into effect with many people for one ‘week.’ In the middle of the ‘week’ sacrifices and offerings will come to an end. In one part of the temple a hated thing that destroys will be set up. It will remain until the LORD brings the end he has ordered.*<sup>Dan.8:26-27</sup>

When Jesus was born, the Magi came to worship Him because they recognised that He was *King of the Jews*, whereas Herod the Great (who was not even a Jew—he was Idumean, i.e. from Edom and a descendant from Esau) saw Jesus as a rival and wanted to kill Him: *After Jesus' birth, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews? When we were in the east, we saw his star. Now we have come to worship him." When King Herod heard about it, he was very upset... He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance.*<sup>Matt.2:1-3;16</sup> Herod's son, Herod Antipas, also wanted to kill Jesus: *At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus. They said to him, "Leave this place. Go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."*<sup>Lk.13:31</sup> And when he eventually met Jesus, he still could not accept that that he was "*king of the Jews*": *So Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. At that time Herod was also in Jerusalem. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very pleased. He had been wanting to see Jesus for a long time. He had heard much about him. He hoped to see Jesus do a miracle. Herod asked him many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there. With loud shouts they brought charges against him. Herod and his soldiers laughed at him and made fun of him.*<sup>Lk.23:7-</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Although Pilate had the inscription: **Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews**, placed above Jesus on the cross, he did not understand the true significance of that statement. *Pilate had a notice prepared. It was fastened to the cross. It read, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read the sign. The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The sign was written in the Aramaic, Latin and Greek languages. The chief priests of the Jews argued with Pilate. They said, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews.' Write that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate answered, "I have written what I have written."*<sup>Jn.19:19-22</sup> 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*<sup>Matt.2:2</sup> died with the "*certificate of debt*" to Caesar that stated: "*Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.*"<sup>Jn.19:1</sup> <sup>9</sup> 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.*<sup>Col.2:13-15</sup> **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.*<sup>2Cor.5:21</sup> *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*<sup>1Jn.3:5</sup> *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.*<sup>Is.53:5-6</sup> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.*<sup>1Pet.2:25</sup> 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.*<sup>Jn.19:28-30</sup> **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.*<sup>Col.1:20</sup>

Although Jesus was born "*king of the Jews*," He always was, and still is, King of the Universe: *Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth... Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else and he holds all creation together.*<sup>Col.1:15-17</sup> But He

humbled Himself by becoming human and living in a body so that He could redeem us humans: *So when Christ came into the world, he said, 'You didn't want sacrifices and offerings. Instead, you prepared a body for me... I have come to do what you want.'* First Christ said, *"You didn't want sacrifices and offerings... You weren't pleased with them."* Then he said, *"Here I am. I have come to do what you want."* ...*We have been made holy because Jesus Christ offered his body once and for all time.*<sup>Heb.10:5-10</sup> All that now remains for us to do is to accept Jesus as our King: **Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.** *You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*<sup>Jn.18:37</sup> Let's follow the Wise men's example: ***Where is the king... we have come to worship him.***<sup>Matt.2:1</sup> Worship Him by obeying His command to trust Him—not only for our eternal destiny but also for our daily destiny, with the little things as well as the large things of life.



## August

The angel of the LORD stands guard around those who have respect for Him. And He saves them. Ps.34:7

### Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2018. Ps.13

**More than overcomers:** *Never stop reading this Scroll of the Law. Day and night you must think about what it says. Make sure you do everything that is written in it. Then things will go well with you. And you will have great success. Here is what I am commanding you to do. Be strong and brave. Do not be terrified. Do not lose hope. I am the LORD your God. I will be with you everywhere you go.*<sup>Josh.1:8-9</sup>

When God instructed Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, it was part of God's big plan of redemption for mankind through Jesus Christ. Although the people and places in the story were real, they also represented spiritual truths. As we see how Joshua overcame the difficulties he faced, it will help us to understand the timeless principles of God's Kingdom, and so help us overcome the difficulties that we face. Let's emulate the peoples' trust in God but also learn from their mistakes as we see the wonder of God's plan of salvation illustrated in this story of Joshua and Jericho. *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*<sup>Rom.15:4</sup> *Now those things happened as examples for us. They are supposed to keep us from longing for evil things, as the people of Israel did.... Those things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who are living at the time when God's work is being completed. So be careful. When you think you are standing firm, you might fall. You are tempted in the same way all other human beings are. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted any more than you can take. But when you are tempted, God will give you a way out so that you can stand up under it.*<sup>1Cor.10:6-13</sup>

Before Jesus came, people were able to know God, but their privileges were limited and they had to meticulously keep the rules of their religion (the Law). But when Jesus came, the spiritual truths that the OT prefigured came into play (including the story of Joshua as illustrated by his life and actions). These spiritual truths included: having sins forgiven, as opposed to sins being merely covered up (atoned); a good conscience before God, as opposed to feeling guilty (which meant having to repeatedly offer sacrifices); having God come to us and staying with us, as opposed to us having to come to God and then leaving Him; being made holy through the new-birth, as opposed to trying to be holy by keeping rules. The story of how Joshua overcame Jericho provide us with some very clear principles on how to live happily (victoriously), especially when life become difficult and our problems seem insurmountable.

**1 Know your problems.** Moses sent 12 people (including Joshua) to spy out the land, but 10 of them thought the problems were too big because they didn't trust God—fear is more contagious than faith. Joshua only sent out 2 people and they came back saying: *"We're sure the LORD has given the whole land over to us. All of the people there are weak with fear because of us."*<sup>Josh.2:24</sup> Whose report will you believe? We are blessed if we don't sit with those who mock God's promises: *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*<sup>Ps.1:1-2</sup> Most of our difficulties are only problems because we don't trust God to look after us! *Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? ...But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*<sup>Lk.12:22-32</sup> We already have everything we need to live a holy life: *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.*<sup>2Pet.1:3-4</sup> God is for us, He is with us, and He will never leave us—so why should we see life’s difficulties as a problem for God? And why should we see life’s difficulties as a problem for us either? Let’s make sure that we always see life from God’s perspective.

**2 Prepare yourself.** Before Joshua led the Israelites into battle to take Jericho, they had to cross the river Jordon and this illustrates Baptism. At conversion we are spiritually immersed (baptised) into the Body of Christ: *Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*<sup>Rom.6:3-4</sup> Water Baptism of Believers represents the spiritual baptism (immersion) into the Body of Christ—new-birth, but although the ceremony of water-baptism can’t save anyone, our obedience saves us through Jesus’ resurrection: *baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*<sup>1Pet.3:21-22</sup>

Although water-baptism is a good start, we must live differently afterwards if it is to mean anything at all. The Israelites were circumcised after they crossed the river Jordan and this act distinguished them from the other nations. The ceremony included cutting off some of their flesh and represents our distinct new life in Christ where we realize that our birth-nature (that is dead to God and called “*the flesh*”) is removed so that we *count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*<sup>Rom.6:11</sup> Until we are made alive to God (born-again) **and also live like Believers**, we appear just like the rest of humanity. Paul tells the Corinthian Church to **stop acting** like mere men—we are better than that because we are born-again Believers who have been redeemed by the Blood of Jesus. *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? ...Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?*<sup>1Cor.3:3-4,16</sup> New birth requires new life and a new life-style, with a new outlook: *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.*<sup>Col.3:1-3</sup>

The Israelites were circumcised at Gilgal which means “*roll*” because it was there that God rolled their reproach away: *Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” So the place has been called Gilgal [Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew for roll.] to this day.*<sup>Josh.5:9</sup>

What child would keep on telling their parents daily that they are not good enough to be called their child or that they don’t deserve to live with their parents? No! Their family home is where they belong—because they are family!!! We must leave our pre-conversion life with its guilt, condemnation and fear, and appreciate God’s total forgiveness because if we don’t, we are short-sighted and have forgotten what God has done for us: *In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who fail to develop in this way are short-sighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.*<sup>2Pet.1:5-9</sup>

**3 Obedience—do what God says.** Joshua was told to march around Jericho for 6 days and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day to march around 7 times—13 times in all—and each time blow 7 trumpets. Initially this looks pointless and futile but doing things God’s way always works. In Bible

symbolism, trumpets represent “God’s imminent intervention” and 7 represents “complete” or “ending”, so the Israelites were declaring God’s imminent intervention that would end their problem—and that is what happened! On the 13<sup>th</sup> time when the people shouted, the walls collapsed! **Obedience is the key to seeing our difficulties become God’s opportunities.** For the Believer, water-baptism after conversion is a simple yet fundamental act of obedience; and so is remembering Jesus’ death in the bread and wine; and so is meeting together with other Believers for encouragement and edification. Doing what God says—obedience (which is worship)—is an act of love for us now that we know we have been forgiven, but it is never a burden: *For this is the love of God: that we keep his commandments. And his commandments do not weigh us down, because everyone who has been fathered by God conquers the world.*<sup>1Jn.5:3-4</sup>

When Joshua followed God’s plan, his difficulties became God’s opportunities. There were still problems to resolve—especially sin (see Achan<sup>Josh.7</sup> and the unnecessary problems at Ai)—but the Israelites were still overcomers! And we can live as overcomers regardless of our difficulties (or our mistakes) because we have an even greater leader than Joshua—we have Jesus Christ as our Leader. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.*<sup>Heb.12:1-2</sup>

### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2018. Ps.15 Mk.16**

**We Believers believe—and we are saved to serve!** *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will...*<sup>Mk.16:16-17</sup>

Most Theologians and Bible Commentary authors believe that the last part of Mark’s Gospel was not originally written by Mark but was added later to properly conclude the biography of Jesus. Regardless of whether that is true or not, the end of Mark’s Gospel as we have it in our Bibles today, was certainly accepted as Scripture by the Early Church Fathers and as none of it conflicts with the doctrine found in the rest of the New Testament, we can treat all of Mark’s Gospel as Scripture inspired by God—as we do the rest of the Bible.<sup>2Tim.3:16</sup>

We saw last week that before the Israelites could overcome the difficulties they faced (Jericho), they had to cross the River Jordan. Their parents and grandparents had previously crossed the Red Sea and although this symbolised Baptism, it did not make them holy and they never experienced God’s rest (peace): *For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn’t share the faith of those who listened to God. For only we who believe can enter his rest. As for the others, God said, In my anger I took an oath: They will never enter my place of rest.*<sup>Heb.4:2-3</sup> So we should take heed that we don’t make the same mistakes that they did—or rely on our religion to make us holy: *Remember our history, friends, and be warned. All our ancestors were led by the providential Cloud and taken miraculously through the Sea. They went through the waters, in a baptism like ours, as Moses led them from enslaving death to salvation life. They all ate and drank identical food and drink, meals provided daily by God. They drank from the Rock, God’s fountain for them that stayed with them wherever they were. And the Rock was Christ. But just experiencing God’s wonder and grace didn’t seem to mean much—most of them were defeated by temptation during the hard times in the desert, and God was not pleased. The same thing could happen to us. We must be on guard so that we never get caught up in wanting our own way as they did. And we must not turn our religion into a circus as they did—“First the people partied, then they threw a dance.”<sup>1Cor.10:1-7</sup> Crossing the river Jordan also symbolises Baptism, but not even Joshua could give them the true rest that God had promised—because that only comes from personal faith: *Now if Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come. So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of**



God. For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labours, just as God did after creating the world. So let us do our best to enter that rest.<sup>Heb.4:8-11</sup> Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.<sup>2Pet.1:2</sup> Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.<sup>Ps.119:165</sup>

At conversion we are spiritually immersed (baptised) into the Body of Christ: Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.<sup>Rom.6:3-4</sup> This experience of New Birth is a supernatural miracle where God removes our dead spirit and replaces it with a living spirit that is motivated to honour and obey God: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.<sup>Ezek.36:26-27</sup> This is the covenant I will make with Israel after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds. I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God. And they will be my people.<sup>Heb.8:8</sup> The ceremony of Water Baptism of Believers symbolizes the spiritual baptism (immersion) into the Body of Christ—our new-birth—but the actual ceremony of water-baptism can't save anyone. **It is the resurrection of Jesus that saves us** and our obedience gives us a clear conscience: baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.<sup>1Pet.3:21-22</sup>

Although water-baptism is a good start, it is just that—a start and we must live differently afterwards if our spiritual new life is to mean anything at all. We must count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.<sup>Rom.6:11</sup> Until we believe (are born-again) **and also live like Believers**, we appear just like the rest of humanity. The noun “Believer” is taken from the verb “to believe” and describes what we do. Just as walkers, walk; runners, run; jumpers, jump; so believers, believe! So, if we don't believe then we are not Believers! However, Believers can **act** like unbelievers—they can act like mere humans instead of the “Blood bought, Holy Spirit filled, sons of God” that they are. Paul tells us to **stop acting** like mere men—we are better than that **because God lives in us**. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? ...Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?<sup>1Cor.3:3-4;16</sup> (Note: Jesus, quoting David, says that we are “gods”: 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?<sup>2In.10:34-36</sup> But the context of this quote is about **living like God** by making sound judgements—it is not saying that we are little deities. We are **NOT** deities or divine beings—we are physical, mortal beings who will die someday. But if we don't live like sons of God then we will die like mere men and not sons of God!<sup>Ps.82:7</sup>)

Believers, believe because they have a revelation from God about God—He has opened their eyes to see the Light—Jesus Christ: You will open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from Satan's control to God's. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and a share among God's people who are made holy by believing in me.<sup>Ads.26:18</sup> This this leads to a New Life with a New Lifestyle, and a New Outlook on life: 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.<sup>Col.3:1-3</sup> But unbelievers are already condemned: God loved the world this way: He gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world. Those who believe



in him won't be condemned. But those who don't believe are already condemned because they don't believe in God's only Son.<sup>Jn.3:16-18</sup> (Belief and Baptism equals Salvation but only Unbelief equals Condemnation—no-one is condemned for not being baptised. However, Believers who are not baptised are disobedient and miss the full blessings of obeying God.)

Salvation is much more than being saved **from** sin, satan and hell—salvation is being saved **for** heaven, wholeness and health (although this is primarily *spiritual health*, it directly affects our mental and physical health too) and salvation is also being saved **to** serve God. This is the Good News of the Kingdom (our Salvation) and it is for everyone: *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you..."*<sup>Lk.2:10-12</sup> Just as the Shepherds were given a sign to know that Jesus was the Christ, so we too have been given signs to know Jesus is the Christ: *And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.*<sup>Mk.16:17-18</sup> But signs are just that—they are signs! They point the way—that's all. Signs are not the substance nor are signs evidence. The substance and the evidence of the reality of Jesus and what our faith is based on is **Jesus' resurrection!** Signs and wonders—miracles—point to Jesus and they help us share the good news of God's plan of redemption for mankind through Jesus Christ. Signs and wonders are also evidence of God's love. God's intervention in our life displays His love for us and should cause us to marvel—and there is no greater intervention in our life than the New Birth: *God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.*<sup>1Jn.4:9-10</sup>

If we are Believers then we believe and we are saved—we are saved **from** hell, satan and sin, and we are saved **for** heaven, wholeness and health—but **we are saved to serve**. Let's continue to believe and only say what God says about us—especially only saying what He says about our sins, our sicknesses, our sorrows, our worries, our concerns and our fears! Let's make our lips do their duty, filling them with the Word of God. Let's make our lips say what God says about our situation and not allow them to say anything to the contrary. Confession is an affirmation of a Bible truth that we have embraced—it is simply believing with our heart and repeating with our lips God's own declaration of what we are and what we have in Christ. So, let's live our lives with a good confession and with a good conscience as we serve God by pointing others to Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

### **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2018. Ps.16. Memorials**

**Memorials:** *Then Samuel got a big stone. He set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer. He said, "The LORD has helped us every step of the way."*<sup>1Sam.7:12</sup>

We saw last week that **signs point the way** and this is especially true of spiritual signs—including miracles, healings and prophecy—which should all point to Jesus: *For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.*<sup>Rev.19:10</sup> **But memorials help us to remember.** We have War Memorials in most towns and villages and also a national Day of Remembrance in November to help us remember the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) maintains cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations in more than 150 countries and territories to honour the 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars. The National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire has over 300 Memorials to honour those who have served, and continue to serve, our nation in many different ways—both Military and Civilian—and I led

the Ambulance Service biennial memorial service there in 2016. Other more local events (mostly tragedies) also have memorials. Dover holds an annual Memorial Service to remember the disastrous night of 6 March 1987 when MS Herald of Free Enterprise (a roll-on/roll-off ferry) capsized moments after leaving the Belgian port of Zeebrugge for Dover, and 193 passengers and crew died. This week Omagh held a Memorial Service to remember those who died in IRA bombing 20 years ago.

Eating Bread and drinking wine together is a **memorial** to God's love. God so loved mankind that He gave His only Son to die for us and Jesus asked that when we eat and drink together, we should **remember** His death: *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*<sup>1Cor.11:23-26</sup> But we can't remember Jesus' death without remembering His resurrection, because it is His resurrection that completes our salvation: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.*<sup>1Pet.1:3-4</sup> Although for convenience sake we have made this memorial into a religious ceremony, the fact remains that that Jesus has instigated the New Covenant at the cost of His life (the New Covenant is "*in His blood*") and He wants us to remember this when we eat and drink together! Notwithstanding that a few denominations only participate in this memorial only once or twice a year and the Salvation Army don't celebrate this memorial at all, this simple memorial meal has become a regular part of most Christians' tradition.

God has also given us the rainbow as a **memorial** to His love. Rainbows are seen whenever there are water drops in the air and sunlight shines from behind the observer—most frequently when it rains. The first mention of rain in the Bible was when God told Noah He would flood the earth: *Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth. It will rain for 40 days and 40 nights. I will destroy from the face of the earth every living thing I have made.*<sup>Gen.7:4</sup> We presume that it had not rained up till then because the Bible records that when God created the earth it did not rain: *When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land.*<sup>Gen.2:4-6</sup> But after the flood rain was a normal part of the earth's weather system and so the rainbow became a regular occurrence and God made the rainbow a memorial so we would remember that He will never flood the whole earth again: *I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life.*<sup>Gen.9:13-15</sup> Now when we see a rainbow, it is a memorial to God's love and we should remember that God will not be angry with those who are Believers: *"During Noah's time I took an oath and made a promise. I said I would never cover the earth with water again. In the same way, I have promised not to be angry with you. I will never punish you again. The mountains might shake. The hills might be removed. But my faithful love for you will never be shaken. And my covenant that promises peace to you will never be broken," says the LORD.*<sup>Is.54:9-10</sup> God won't be angry with us Believers because God has forgiven our sin when Jesus bore our punishment: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*<sup>2Cor.5:21</sup> *But the servant was pierced because we had sinned. He was crushed because we had done what was evil. He was punished to make us whole again. and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all... And the LORD has placed on his servant the sins of all of us... The LORD says, "It was my plan to crush him and cause him to suffer. I made his life a guilt offering to pay for sin.*<sup>Is.53:5-10</sup> Although God said that

He will never again destroy the world with a flood, He has also said that one day He will destroy the world by fire—so we should be at peace with God and live pure, holy lives: *Long ago, God's word brought the heavens into being. His word separated the earth from the waters. And the waters surrounded it. But those people forget things like that on purpose. The waters also flooded the world of that time. It was destroyed. By God's word the heavens and earth of today are being reserved for fire. They are being kept for the day when God will judge. Then ungodly people will be destroyed. Dear friends, here is one thing you must not forget. With the Lord a day is like a thousand years. And a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow to keep his promise. He is not slow in the way some people understand it. He is patient with you. He doesn't want anyone to be destroyed. Instead, he wants all people to turn away from their sins. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar. Fire will destroy everything in them. God will judge the earth and everything in it. So everything will be destroyed. And what kind of people should you be? You should lead holy and godly lives. Live like that as you look forward to the day of God. It will make the day come more quickly. On that day fire will destroy the heavens. Its heat will melt everything in them. But we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth. Godliness will make its home there. All of this is in keeping with God's promise. Dear friends, I know you are looking forward to that. So try your best to be found pure and without blame. Be at peace with God. Remember that while our Lord is waiting patiently to return, people are being saved.*<sup>2Pet.3:5-15</sup>

Although God has given us these timeless memorials to help us remember His love, we can make our own memorials to His love as well. Joshua made a memorial after he led the people across the River Jordan, so future generations would remember God's love: *Joshua set up the 12 stones at Gilgal. They were the ones the people had taken out of the Jordan. Then he spoke to the people of Israel. He said, "In days to come, your children after you will ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' Their parents must tell them, 'Israel went across the Jordan River on dry ground.' The LORD your God dried up the Jordan for you until you had gone across it. He did to the Jordan River the same thing he had done to the Red Sea. He dried up the Red Sea ahead of us until we had gone across it. He did it so that all of the nations on earth would know that he is powerful. He did it so that you would always have respect for the LORD your God."*<sup>Josh.4:20-24</sup> Often it is the timing of something that makes it miraculous rather than the actual event itself. In 1927 there was an earthquake near Jericho which resulted in a mudslide about 18 miles upstream at a place called *Damia* (*Adam* in Joshua's time) which completely blocked the River Jordan. There are at least 6 other recorded times in the last 1000 years when the River Jordan has been stopped by mudslides for one or two days at *Damia* (see *The Miracles of Exodus* by C Humphries). So, the miracle that allowed the Israelites to cross the River Jordan in Joshua's time, was most likely in the timing of the event (as the Priests stepped into the river) rather than the actual stopping of the water flow: *As soon as the priests step into the Jordan, it will stop flowing. The water that's coming down the river will pile up in one place. That's how you will know that the living God is among you."* So the people took their tents down. They prepared to go across the Jordan River. The priests who were carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. The water of the Jordan was going over its banks. It always does that at the time the crops are being gathered. The priests came to the river. Their feet touched the water's edge. Right away the water that was coming down the river stopped flowing. It piled up far away at a town called *Adam* near *Zarethan*. The water that was flowing down to the Dead Sea was completely cut off. So the people went across the Jordan River opposite Jericho.<sup>Josh.3:13-16</sup> So too with us, God's timing is often more miraculous than event itself—but occasionally God does perform a creative miracle as well. Let's remember who God really is and give Him the respect that He deserves. *You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.*<sup>Ps.77:14</sup>

But in remembering God's love, we should not make the same mistake that the Israelites did when a memorial became the focus of their adulation. *But they grew tired on the way. So they spoke against God. They also spoke against Moses. They said to them, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt? Do you want us to die here in the desert? We don't have any bread! We don't have any water! And we hate this*

awful food!” Then the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people of Israel. The snakes bit them. Many of the people died.<sup>Nu.21:4-6</sup> However, when they repented, God provided a solution to their self-inflicted problems: *The others came to Moses. They said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.*<sup>Nu.21:7-9</sup> That snake was an illustration of how we can be healed from the results of our sin through the crucifixion of Jesus: *No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.*<sup>Jn.3:13-15</sup> Years later, Hezekiah destroyed that bronze snake because people were worshipping it instead of treating it as a memorial: *In GOD’s opinion Hezekiah was a good king; he kept to the standards of his ancestor David... he pulverized the ancient bronze serpent that Moses had made; at that time the Israelites had taken up the practice of sacrificing to it—they had even dignified it with a name, Nehushtan (The Old Serpent).*<sup>2Kg.18:3-4</sup> We need to be careful that we don’t make an idol out of a memorial (including the cross) and that we only worship the Creator—never the creation.

Can you remember times in your life when God intervened? Let’s remember how the Lord has helped us and thank Him: *Then Samuel got a big stone. He set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer. He said, “The LORD has helped us every step of the way.”*<sup>1Sam.7:12</sup>

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2018. Ps.17:1-7. Kody and Ami Friesen**

**This week I have included a couple of articles that I read recently—read and be blessed!**

**An Easy Principle to Test Your Take on Scripture**

As an ambassador for Christ, how can you be clear-thinking and confident if you’re not sure whether or not you’re misinterpreting a Bible passage? I want to show you a trick to help you weed out bad Bible interpretations, the kind that don’t fit the context or the flow of thought of a passage. I call it the “**paraphrase principle**.”

Here’s a quick example of how this works to help you get the idea.

Worship leaders often cite Jesus’ statement, “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself*” (Jn. 12:32). Then they apply the insight by inviting the church to sing heartily, taking “*lifted up*” to be synonymous with “*exalted in worship*.” Sometimes that’s exactly what it means. But is that what Jesus meant in this passage? Let’s see.

Using the paraphrase principle, when we insert the alleged synonym into the larger passage (v. 32–33), it reads: “*And I, if I am exalted in worship, will draw all men to Myself. But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.*”

Oops. Our worship is going to kill Jesus? You see the problem. Clearly, “*lifted up*” in this case does not mean to praise but to crucify. Inserting the correct synonym into the passage now makes perfect sense: “*And I, if I am crucified, will draw all men to Myself.*”

Getting an accurate understanding of Scripture is critical for your growth as a Christian ambassador. The **paraphrase principle** is simply another tool in your toolbox to help you do that more effectively.

Greg Koukl

**Three Reasons Every Church Service Doesn’t Need to Be Epic**

If you measured church life only from the tweets of some pastors, you’d assume church services are awesome for every other congregation but your own. Phrases like, “*Killer praise band*,” “*Home run sermon*,” and “*Amazing stage design*” fill Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram feeds on Sunday afternoons. Meanwhile, at your church, the lapel mic stopped working halfway through the



sermon, the Scripture verses on the screen were in the wrong version, and the date for the church picnic was incorrect in the bulletin. Our churches need to pursue excellence—in our sermon preparation, in our music, in our communication. Everything we do should be done well to the glory of God. But sometimes, pastors and church leaders feel pressure—from the pews and from within—to try to make every Sunday spectacular in such a way that we forget the purpose of our weekly gathering and how God makes us grow. Here are some reasons for pastors to take a deep breath—and for people in the pews to see Sundays a little differently.

### **Big moments matter, but small moments are formative**

Most of us have big moments that were spiritually life-changing. Perhaps it was a message at a Christian conference or sermon at camp. Or maybe it was a particular sermon our pastor preached. But our spiritual lives are formed by a lifetime of small moments. **We grow by a series of weekly, mostly forgettable church services—not from one big epic church service.** We learn the Word, not from one class or one sermon, but from years of classes and sermons. The prophet Isaiah reminds us that the Word grows in us, *line after line, a little here, a little there.*<sup>Is.28:10</sup> As I think about my own life, I can point to two or three “*light bulb*” moments, but mostly I’m grateful for the spiritual rhythms of going to church, singing the hymns, prayer, and fellowship. Those disciplines built into my heart’s spiritual muscles are exercised in times of temptation or trial.

### **Pastors are shepherds, not conference speakers**

I’m grateful for gifted leaders who can encourage thousands at popular conferences. My life has been enriched by hearing these men and women speak. I even help plan these for my organization. And yet what our churches need, week after week, are not conference speakers. We need pastors. We need shepherds. Pastors and church leaders, we fail our people when we approach each week as if that one message is going to change everyone’s lives forever. It might. Or it might be one small thread in a tapestry of ministry. What’s more, when we treat weekly church services like camp meeting or revival, people become exhausted. People can’t come forward every week. There won’t be someone committing to sell everything and go to the mission field every week. What our people do need to hear—every week—is a word from the Lord. They need the formative experience of worship. They need the nurture of fellowship.

### **People aren’t always ready for victory**

I once heard a pastor say, “*Sometimes our people use up all their faith just to walk in the door.*” While pastors have been marinating in the Word all week, some people in the congregation may have had the worst week of their lives. They may come limping into church, having lost a family member, or having just seen a budget they can’t balance, or having received a devastating diagnosis. They need space to lament, to weep, to mourn. But if every week the Sunday worship gathering is like a revival meeting or a conference, if our worship is always upbeat and victorious, those who are hurting may not hear the comforting words of their Good Shepherd echo from our liturgy. Our services, instead, should mirror the worship mosaic of Scripture. Some passages offer hope and victory. Others challenge and convict. And still others—like the Psalms and much of the prophets—are words of lament. Let’s focus on the whole counsel of God, not only the parts that get our adrenaline going.

The good news for weary pastors and bored church members is this: **Sermons will likely be forgotten, but your faithfulness will reverberate into eternity.** And there’s no need for an epic moment every Sunday. Instead, we can let Jesus be the hero and allow the Bible to do its work. Because what people need each week is to simply be fed the Word of God, to experience spiritual community, and to live out the ordinary regular patterns that form us as God’s people.

*Daniel Darling*

## September

Taste and see that the LORD is good. Blessed is the man who goes to Him for safety.<sup>Ps.34:8</sup>

### Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2018. Ps.17:6-15.

#### Is conversion necessary to be an authentic Christian?

Our English word “conversion” comes from Latin and means “a complete turn around”. The word is used mostly in the NT as “turn”: *If someone strikes you on the right cheek, **turn** to him the other also.*<sup>Matt.5:39</sup> But it is also used for **regeneration**: *Paul and Barnabas told how the Gentiles had been **converted**. This news made all the believers very glad.*<sup>Acts.15:3</sup> This regeneration experience of “conversion” is absolutely fundamental to Christianity and also called “born-again”: *I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*<sup>Jn.3:3</sup> There are some genuine Christians who have had a very dramatic conversion experience which they can identify occurring at a specific moment, and there are some genuine Christians who have no idea when they ever had a conversion experience and they could never identify a single moment when a conversion happened. So what do we mean when we say “**converted**”?

John Bunyan, in his *Pilgrim's Progress* tells of a man named Pilgrim who starts a life journey after innocently praying. As a result of praying he becomes aware of a burden on his back which he then realised had always been there. It seems to Pilgrim as if the burden becomes increasingly heavier. No matter how hard he tries he cannot free himself from this burden. He embarks on a journey to find relief. He meets Evangelist who points him to a hill called Golgotha. It is there that he meets a Saviour and realises that this Saviour's blood still flows. As he gazes into the face of the Saviour he is struck by the epiphany that this Saviour is dying for him. “*For me He dies! For me He dies!*” cries Pilgrim. And as the blood of the Saviour flows toward him the burden of sin, guilt and shame snaps off his back and rolls down the hill. At that point Pilgrim is converted! So passionately did John Bunyan believe that Christianity could only be entered into through conversion that he was prepared to be jailed for that belief! It was in that prison cell that he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* which champions the Biblical doctrine that salvation was by God's gifts of grace and faith resulting in *regeneration (conversion)*.

Ezekiel described it best when he prophesied about the salvation that Jesus would bring: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*<sup>Ezek.36:26</sup> The New Testament describes this as transition from **Darkness to Light** and from **Death to Life**: *For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.*<sup>Col.1:13-14</sup> 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.<sup>1Pet.2:9</sup> *The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over us, but all who receive God's wonderful, gracious gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.*<sup>Rom.5:17</sup> *If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead.*<sup>1Jn.3:14</sup> The Bible teaches that every person is in need of salvation—regardless of their social standing. *Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when God chose you. Not many of you were considered wise by human standards. Not many of you were powerful. Not many of you belonged to important families.*<sup>1Cor.1:26</sup> Yet God can save anyone. In the Old Testament we have the account of the most wicked King eventually turning to God in repentance—**King Manasseh**. The story of King Manasseh is one of the saddest episodes of Judah's history. He was born during the final years of king Hezekiah (his father), which were deplorably squandered by Hezekiah leaving Manasseh with little more than contempt for God. He demonstrated this contempt by committing some of the grossest acts of indecency and human rights violations imaginable.

**Manasseh was the most wicked king.** Perhaps the most vile of these included his assassination of Isaiah the prophet. This is the Talmudic account of that murderous rampage (which should be considered legendary rather than mythical): *Manasseh killed Isaiah. Manasseh said to Isaiah, "Moses, your master, said, 'There shall no man see God and live';<sup>Ex.33:20</sup> but you have said, 'I saw the Lord seated upon his throne'<sup>Is.6:1</sup>"* and then he went on to point out other contradictions. Isaiah thought: "I know that he will not accept my explanations; why should I increase his guilt?" He then uttered the Unpronounceable Name, a cedar-tree opened, and Isaiah disappeared within it. Then Manasseh ordered the cedar to be sawn asunder, and when the saw reached his mouth Isaiah died; thus was he punished for having said, "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* Isaiah's death is also mentioned in Hebrews: *Others were made to suffer greatly. But they refused to be set free. They did that so that after death they would be raised to a better life. Some were laughed at. Some were whipped. Still others were held by chains. They were put in prison. Some were killed with stones. **They were sawn in two...** They were treated badly. The world was not worthy of them... All of those people were praised because they had faith. But none of them received what God had promised. God had planned something better for us. So they would only be made perfect together with us.*<sup>Heb.11:35-40</sup>

**Manasseh continually rejected God.** Manasseh sacrificed his children in illegal and pagan rituals. He established and promoted lewd sexual activity, called "the high places" all in the name religious practice. He even brought pagan objects of worship into the Temple precinct which may have seemed to bring some degree of legitimacy to His wickedness.

**Manasseh justified his evil with religion.** *And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, and he erected altars to the Baals, and made Asherahs, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem shall my name be forever." And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.*<sup>2Chron.33:2-6</sup> Like Manasseh, many people today are justifying their sexual proclivities, 'religiousizing' their worldview, and excusing themselves from the ordinary standards of decency, especially when it comes to the weakest and most vulnerable in our society—children.

**But God knew what would bring Manasseh to repentance.** You may be praying for a strayed loved one to turn to Christ and think they are beyond redemption. But God thinks otherwise! He knows how to bring them home. Firstly, we notice that God *spoke* to Manasseh and Judah. *The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention.*<sup>2Chron.33:10</sup> This included speaking through Isaiah the prophet—but Manasseh and Judah would not listen to God. We then observe that God gave them over to their enemies. In this sense, God "sent" their enemies to attack them: *So the LORD sent the commanders of the Assyrian armies, and they took Manasseh prisoner. They put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon.*<sup>2Chron.33:11</sup> This is similar to what Paul wrote—that people who rebelled against God's will and continually refused to repent, were "given up" by God to fully indulge their sin: *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves.*<sup>Rom.1:24</sup> When the Assyrians came and attacked Manasseh and took him captive, this was a great tragedy. We don't often associate tragedy with God's gracious dealings. But God knew that this is what it would take to bring Manasseh to repentance. It's often amazing how things sometimes seem to turn from bad to worse when we pray for someone to turn to God. I wonder what Isaiah did prior to his execution. Did he pray for Manasseh to repent? If so, the events that transpired almost immediately after his death were an unforeseeable answer to prayer. God used tragedy to humble Manasseh and bring him to repentance.

**It appears from Scripture that God generally uses three broad approaches to lead people to repentance and a Saviour:**

**Firstly**, God uses **kindness** to lead people to repentance. *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*<sup>Rom.2:4</sup>

**Secondly**, it appears that God uses **miracles** to bring people to repentance. Jesus expressed His disappointment that many of the cities in which He performed miracles did not repent: *Then Jesus began to denounce the cities where he had done most of his miracles, because they hadn't turned from their sins and turned to God.*<sup>Matt.11:20</sup>

**Thirdly**, God uses **tragedy** to bring people to repentance. We see this in the life of Manasseh and also in the events in Jerusalem leading up to 70AD during the 42 month bombardment and attack by the Romans in which Israel experienced its great tribulation spoken of by Christ in Matthew 24. The Book of Revelation put it this way: *Everyone was burned by this blast of heat, and they cursed the name of God, who sent all of these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.*<sup>Rev.16:9</sup>

**God knew how to convert Manasseh.** God used at least two of these three means, and possibly all three, to bring Manasseh to repentance. What Jeremiah doesn't record in Second Kings, Ezra draws the attention of the reader to in Second Chronicles. Manasseh humbled himself, prayed to God, repented, and confessed his need for God. *And when he was in distress, he entreated the favour of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*<sup>2Chron.33:12-13</sup> Manasseh's conversion resulted in him reforming Judah, including the religious activity. He rebuilt the Temple altars and made repairs to the House of the Lord. His conversion was so dramatic that it should be regarded as one of the greatest conversions of the Bible. Manasseh's conversion should encourage us to keep praying for those who do not know God and should also give us reason to have hope for a better future for ourselves and our communities because it shows us the extraordinary lengths that God will go to rescue people from seemingly hopeless situations.

**Is conversion necessary or not to be an authentic Christian? YES! And God is in the business of conversion. He loves to convert people and He loves to rescue those who cry out to Him in humility.** Let's pray that we will see many thousands of people authentically converted to Christ all around the world—but especially where we live.

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Ps.18:1-6.**

*"Are you on our side? Or are you on the side of our enemies?" "I am not on either side. I have come as the commander of the LORD's army."*<sup>Josh.5:13-14</sup>

When life is difficult or tragedy strikes, you have probably heard people ask: *"Where is God in all this?"* Or maybe, like Gideon, you have asked a similar question: *"Excuse me, sir! But if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all the miracles our ancestors have told us about? Didn't they say, 'The LORD brought us out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and has handed us over to Midian."*<sup>Judg.5:13</sup> We are followers of Christ and have placed our trust in Jesus Christ the Son of God, so rather than saying *"where is God in all this?"* we should be saying: *If God is for us, who can be against us?*<sup>Rom.8:31</sup> Nevertheless, life is not fair and we can often feel as if everyone is against us. However, the real question is not: *Is God for us?* but rather, *Are we for God? Are we on God's side?* When Joshua asked the man whose side he was on, he replied that he was on God's side: *When Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him. The man was holding a sword. He was ready for battle. Joshua went up to him. He asked, "Are you on our side? Or are you on the side of our enemies?" "I am not on either side," he replied. "I have come as the commander of the LORD's army."*<sup>Josh.5:13-14</sup> We cannot *sit on the fence* when it comes to God, we have to choose whose side we



are on, who we will serve, who we will obey and who we will follow—our self or our Saviour; our interests or God’s interests; our will or God’s Will. *So have respect for the LORD. Serve him. Be completely faithful to him... Serve the LORD. But suppose you don't want to serve him. Then choose for yourselves right now whom you will serve... But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.*<sup>Josh.24:14-15</sup> At the start of our Christian life we made a choice to follow Christ and we publicly stated that we were on His side—we acknowledged that Jesus was our Lord and we committed ourselves to follow Him for the rest of our lives. In fact, if Jesus is not more important to us than even our own family, we are not worthy of Him: *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And anyone who does not pick up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*<sup>Matt.10:37-38</sup> And by saying that we are on God’s side, we are saying that we agree with God—that we support His values, do what He does and say what He says. We represent God and are His Ambassadors!

Today’s *politically correct* culture has conditioned many people to “take offence” at anything and everything—to the extent that if someone says that they feel “offended” by something you say or do, then you have committed an offence against them and they may even try to sue you! But those who do take offence will always come off worse. Instead of taking offence, we should imitate Jesus: *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*<sup>1Pet.2:23</sup> We should not intend to give offence: *whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*<sup>1Cor.10:31-33</sup> *We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.*<sup>2Cor.6:3</sup> But the Gospel will offend people because by nature people are opposed to God. *The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it.*<sup>Jer.6:10</sup> Jesus is called the “rock of offence” and Paul says that people are offended at the message of salvation through the cross: *Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.*<sup>Rom.9:33</sup> *If I were no longer preaching salvation through the cross of Christ, no one would be offended.*<sup>Gal.5:11</sup> *And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.*<sup>Matt.11:6</sup> *If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you... However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*<sup>1Pet.4:14-16</sup>

Like God, we should always do what is right—without partiality: *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him... He is the one you praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes.*<sup>Deut.10:17-21</sup> *Do what is right. Treat everyone the same. Don't take money from people who want special favours. It makes those who are wise close their eyes to the truth. It twists the words of those who do what is right.*<sup>Deut.16:19</sup> *I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.*<sup>1Tim.5:21</sup> When Christians show partiality, they are not following Jesus or supporting His values: *Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.*<sup>Lk.20:21</sup> Paul calls those people immature, carnal and unspiritual: *I had to talk to you as I would to unspiritual, carnal, fleshly people—infants in Christ... You are still following the ways of the world. Some of you are jealous. Some of you argue. So aren't you following the ways of the world? Aren't you acting like ordinary human beings?*<sup>2Cor.3:1-3</sup> Whilst we should have our own distinctives, we should not be divisive. We can differ on issues—even minor doctrines—but we should not be contentious. Divisive Christians are immature and un-spiritual because they are **acting** like mere human beings instead of Believers who follow Christ and in whom the Holy Spirit lives! *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple? God's Spirit lives in you... Here is how you should*

*think of us. We serve Christ. We are trusted with God's secret truth. Those who have been given a trust must prove that they are faithful.*<sup>1Cor.3:16;4:1-2</sup> Of course we should oppose wrong behaviour and sometimes we should even oppose wrong doctrine but we ought to have a reputation for being respectful, not disrespectful; for being encouragers, not discouragers; for building up, not breaking down; for unity, not disunity—we are Proclaimants, not Protestants. *I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.*<sup>1Cor.11:18-19</sup> *Welcome people who are weak in faith, but don't get into an argument over differences of opinion.*<sup>Rom.14:1</sup>

Life is not fair and we are not exempt from trouble or suffering—but Believers, believe! This means that we trust God enough to do what He says. In every circumstance we should not only trust God for our **eternal destiny** but also trust God for our **everyday destiny—glory!** *God wanted his people throughout the world to know the glorious riches of this mystery—which is Christ living in you, giving you the hope of glory. We spread the message about Christ as we instruct and teach everyone with all the wisdom there is. We want to present everyone as mature Christian people. I work hard and struggle to do this while his mighty power works in me.*<sup>Col.1:27-29</sup> We should let our troubles build our faith, not break our faith. *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*<sup>Jas.1:2-4</sup> It is as we experience God's love and faithfulness in our troubles that our faith is established, so that we never have to say: *But if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?* Jesus said that His “food” (spiritual energy) was to obey God: *My food is to do what my Father sent me to do. My food is to finish his work.*<sup>Jn.4:34</sup> Our work is to believe in Jesus: *Then they asked him, “What does God want from us? What works does he want us to do?” Jesus answered, “God's work is to believe in the One he has sent.”*<sup>Jn.6:28-29</sup> Let's continue to trust God so that we are full of spiritual energy. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*<sup>Heb.12:1-3</sup>

When we are on God's side and know that God is for us, it doesn't really matter what people think about us, or say about , or even do to us: *If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ...Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ...No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*<sup>Rom.8:31-39</sup> Yes, God really is for us, so let your faith evict your fear. Instead of being discouraged, we are encouraged; instead of being hopeless, we are hopeful; instead of being in despair, we are at peace; instead of being joyless, we are joyful; as well as being blessed, we become a blessing. *God has said, “I will never leave you. I will never desert you.” So we can say boldly, “The Lord helps me. I will not be afraid. What can a mere man do to me?”*<sup>Heb.13:5-6</sup> Then like David, we will boldly declare: *Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me.*<sup>Ps.23:4</sup>

## Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Ps.18:46-50. Acts 1

**The Book of Acts: Exploits of the Holy Spirit in the Lives of Believers** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*<sup>Acts.1:8</sup>

In the Bible when something is mentioned twice it is usually to emphasise the point being made. This is often seen in the Psalms, where important truths are repeated—as in Psalm 23: *I will fear no evil, for you are with me; followed by: your rod and your staff, they comfort me*—both phrases are saying the same thing but in a slightly different way. So, because there are four accounts of Jesus' ministry (the four Gospels), it shows how important the promised Messiah was—and is! The coming of the Messiah was absolutely pivotal to God's purposes because it is only through Him that anyone can be reconciled to God: *No one else can save us. Indeed, we can be saved only by the power of the one named Jesus and not by any other person.*<sup>Acts.4:12</sup> The purpose of the Old Testament was to signpost the coming Messiah: *Wherefore the Law [the OT] was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be made righteous by faith.*<sup>Gal.3:24</sup> *You search the Scriptures [the OT] because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.*<sup>Jn.5:39-40</sup> And when the Messiah came, He introduced a new era—the Kingdom of God. *I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.*<sup>Lk.4:43</sup> Jesus was born King of the Jews<sup>Matt.2:2</sup> and He died King of the Jews.<sup>Jn.19:19</sup> but God's Kingdom is not limited to physical Jews and includes everyone who is born of God—actually, being a physical Jew makes no difference to God: *A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.*<sup>Rom.2:28-29</sup> *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*<sup>Gal.3:28-29</sup> Even though many refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah—God's Son and King—some did accept Jesus as the Messiah, and some still do today! *He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*<sup>Jn.1:10-14</sup>

It was God becoming Human that upset so many people, especially among the religious people who never really knew God. When the Word became Flesh, God came among us! God spoke a language we can understand! God acted in ways that healed us, that helped us and saved us! But with such a “wow-factor” as God becoming human, there is a danger that we can be impressed, but **only** be impressed. As the spectacular dimensions of this story slowly (or suddenly) dawn upon us, we could easily become enthusiastic spectators, and then let it go at that—become admirers of Jesus, generous with our *ooh's and ah's*, and in our better moments even be inspired to imitate him. It was Luke's task to prevent that, to prevent us from becoming mere spectators to Jesus. Of the original quartet of writers on Jesus, Luke alone continues to tell the story as the apostles and disciples live it into the next generation. The remarkable thing is that it continues to be essentially the same story. The story of Jesus doesn't end with Jesus. It continues in the lives of those who believe in Him. The super-natural does not stop with Jesus. Luke makes it clear that these Christians he wrote about were no more spectators of Jesus than Jesus was a spectator of God—they were in on the action of God, God acting in them, God living in them. Which also means, of course, God acting in us and God living in us. This what the Book of Acts is all about and it is not just about the Acts of the apostles but rather the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and their successors—you and me! And this is seen in the way Luke ends his story: *He [Paul] preached boldly about God's kingdom. No one could keep*

him from teaching people about the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>Acts.28:31</sup> All the other books of the NT have an ending—usually a doxology such as *May the only wise God receive glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen.*<sup>Rom.16:27</sup> But the end of the book of Acts doesn't have a conclusion because the story hasn't finished yet the book of Acts doesn't have an ending because the story hasn't finished yet—**we** continue *teaching people about the Lord Jesus Christ* that Paul and the other apostles started. *For two whole years Paul stayed there in a house he rented. He welcomed all who came to see him. He preached boldly about God's kingdom. No one could keep him from teaching people about the Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>Acts.20:30-31</sup>

When Jesus introduced the Kingdom of God through His preaching, the Jews didn't understand that this Kingdom was spiritual not political—even His Disciples misunderstood the Kingdom of God. They had been expecting the Messiah to “*sit on David's throne*” in Jerusalem and to politically emancipate them from their oppressive Roman overlords. That is why His Disciples asked: *Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*<sup>Acts.1:6</sup> But Jesus had already stated: *My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world... You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.*<sup>Jn.18:36-37</sup> God's Kingdom is not a political kingdom with a geographical location—and certainly not in the physical city of Jerusalem. Paul described the city of Jerusalem as “*enslaved*” because it represented Judaism—the OT religion of rules and regulations that never worked:

*Those things can be taken as examples. The two women stand for two covenants. One covenant comes from Mount Sinai. It gives birth to children who are going to be slaves. It is Hagar. Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia. She stands for the present city of Jerusalem. That's because she and her children are slaves. But the Jerusalem that is above is free. She is our mother.*<sup>Gal.4:24-26</sup> John called the city of Jerusalem, Sodom, Egypt and Babylon because it was the pinnacle of apostasy and where its chief priests killed Jesus and His followers: *the great city where their Lord was nailed to the cross. The city is sometimes pictured as Sodom, or as Egypt.*<sup>Rev.11:8</sup> *A name was written on her forehead. The name was Mystery: Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and Detestable Things of the Earth. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people and of those who testify about Jesus. I was very surprised when I saw her.*<sup>Rev.17:5-6</sup> But God's Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom with spiritual citizens and spiritual rules overseen by a spiritual Ruler—King Jesus—who is “*seated on David's throne*” in the spiritual Jerusalem: *he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.*<sup>Rev.17:14</sup>

This spiritual Jerusalem—also called the *New Jerusalem*—is not made of physical stones but of “*spiritual stones*”—followers of the spiritual King Jesus, the Messiah: *You are coming to Christ, the living stone who was rejected by humans but was chosen as precious by God. You come to him as living stones, a spiritual house that is being built into a holy priesthood. So offer spiritual sacrifices that God accepts through Jesus Christ.*<sup>2Pet.2:4-5</sup> *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. It was coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne. It said, “Now God makes his home with people. He will live with them. They will be his people. And God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be.”...The angel said, “Come. I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” Then he carried me away in a vision. The Spirit took me to a huge, high mountain. He showed me Jerusalem, the Holy City. It was coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God... I didn't see a temple in the city. This was because the Lamb and the Lord God who rules over all are its temple. The city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it. God's glory is its light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by the light of the city. The kings of the world will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut, because there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. Only what is pure will enter it. No one who fools others or does shameful things will enter it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter the city.*<sup>Rev.21:2-27</sup>



To be part of God's spiritual Kingdom, we must have spiritual life—we must be born spiritually as well as physically: *I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'*<sup>Jn.3:5-7</sup> When the Holy Spirit births us into God's spiritual Kingdom, He also spiritually empowers us to live in that spiritual Kingdom—to be the King's witnesses: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*<sup>Acts.1:8</sup>

**The Book of Acts records the exploits of the Holy Spirit in the Lives of Believers:** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*<sup>Acts.1:8</sup> Today, we continue those exploits as we serve God in His spiritual Kingdom which has already come in the lives of Believers. *For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too. So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.*<sup>Rom.14:17-19</sup> So let's continue to live as loyal citizens of God's Kingdom, *teaching people about the Lord Jesus Christ as we as we await our Saviour: But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*<sup>Phil.3:20-21</sup>

## **Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2018. Ps.19:1-6. Acts 2**

**The Book of Acts: This is that.** *In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Holy Spirit on all people.*<sup>Acts.2:17</sup>

**This is that:** *In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Holy Spirit on all people.*<sup>Acts.2:17</sup>

The Bible was written with one purpose in mind—to explain God's plan of salvation for mankind. Jesus was God's plan of Salvation: *Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."*<sup>Jn.14:6</sup> *No one else can save us. Indeed, we can be saved only by the power of the one named Jesus and not by any other person.*<sup>Acts.4:12</sup> The Law given to Moses under the Old Covenant (with all its rules and regulations) pointed to this wonderful plan of salvation in Jesus: *You search the Scriptures [the OT] because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.*<sup>Jn.5:39-40</sup> So when Jesus completed God's plan of salvation, those rituals of the Old Covenant became obsolete: *This is the covenant I will make with Israel after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds. I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God. And they will be my people... By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.*<sup>Heb.8:10-13</sup> But there is a direct link between the Old Covenant's laws and the New Covenant's liberty.

When Moses led Israelites out of Egypt, their status changed from disorganised slaves to an organised society and from a horde of nobodies to a holy nation but the turning point was **Passover**. At that first Passover, each Israelite family killed a lamb and painted its blood on the door-posts of their houses before going inside to eat it. When God's judgement came on Egypt, the angel "passed-over" every house with blood on the door-posts and that family was saved from death. This event was then celebrated each year as a reminder that God had saved them from death, emancipated them from slavery and established them as a nation. Many hundreds of years later, another Lamb was killed at Passover resulting in God's people being saved from spiritual death, emancipated from spiritual slavery and established as a spiritual nation. *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*<sup>1Cor.5:7</sup> *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*<sup>Rom.6:22-23</sup> *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out*

*of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*<sup>1Pet.2:9-10</sup>

Unlike the other nations around them, Israel didn't need a king or a ruler because God was their King and Ruler. They were not "*socialists*" (where production and distribution of goods are owned and controlled collectively) and neither were they "*communists*" (where everything is owned collectively)—they were "*family*". God had changed their father's name from Jacob to Israel, which means "*God fights*" and so as the **Children of Israel**, God would fight for them and give them victory. However, they still required rules to guide them—and those rules were also to remind them that God has standards and He expects His people to keep those standards: *I am the LORD. I brought you up out of Egypt to be your God. So be holy, because I am holy.*<sup>Lev.11:45</sup> At **Pentecost**—50 days after Passover—God gave the Israelites His guidance on how to live honourably and reverently as God's people—the **Law**. *Now obey me completely. Keep my covenant. If you do, then out of all of the nations you will be my special treasure. The whole earth is mine. But you will be a kingdom of priests to serve me. You will be my holy nation.*<sup>Ex.19:5-6</sup> God had asked Moses to go up a mountain where He spoke directly to him amidst thunder, lightning, fire and smoke—which absolutely terrified the people: *They said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself. Then we'll listen. But don't let God speak to us. If he does, we'll die."* *Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. God has come to put you to the test. He wants you to have respect for him. That will keep you from sinning."*<sup>Ex.20:19-20</sup> But whilst God was giving His laws to Moses and writing them down on a stone tablet, the people rebelled against God by making a golden calf which they then worshipped and this resulted in God punishing them leaving 3000 people dead. *The Levites did as Moses commanded. About 3,000 of the people died that day... The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a terrible sin. But now I will go up to the LORD. Maybe if I pray to him, he will forgive your sin."*<sup>Ex.32:28-30</sup> However, these events were illustrations of God's plan of salvation for mankind. **Passover** prefigured Jesus dying on the cross as the Lamb of God. *John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*<sup>1:29</sup> *Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*<sup>Acts.4:27-28</sup> The giving of the Law at **Pentecost** (50 days after Passover), prefigured the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when God would write His laws on people's hearts instead of writing them on a stone. And He continues to write them on people's hearts today—our conscience! *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*<sup>Ezek.36:26-27</sup> *The power to do what we do comes from God. He has given us the power to serve under a new covenant. The covenant is not based on the written Law of Moses. It comes from the Holy Spirit. **The written Law kills, but the Spirit gives life.** The Law was written in letters on stone. Even though it was a way of serving God, it led to death... Since all of that is true, won't the work of the Holy Spirit be even more glorious? The Law that sentences people to death is glorious. How much more glorious is the work of the Spirit! His work makes people right with God. The glory of the old covenant is nothing compared with the far greater glory of the new. The glory of the old is fading away. How much greater is the glory of the new! It will last forever.*<sup>2Cor.3:5-11</sup> In keeping with the type, and to illustrate that ***the written Law kills, but the Spirit gives life***, the same number of people that died on the first Day of Pentecost when Moses received the Law, were saved when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost when God gave the Holy Spirit. *With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*<sup>Acts.2:40-41</sup> The purpose of the Old Covenant (the Law) was to signpost the coming Messiah: *Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be made righteous by faith.*<sup>Gal.3:24</sup> And when Jesus came, He introduced a different Covenant—the **New Covenant**: *And he took bread, gave*

thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."<sup>Lk.22:19-20</sup> This New Covenant—which replaced the Old Covenant—was established with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus died as the Passover Lamb. However, the Day of Pentecost was also the beginning of the main harvest. Harvest time actually began 2 days after the beginning of Passover when the priests cut the first sheaf of grain, which was then waved before God as an offering. *The LORD's Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month... When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.*<sup>Lev.23:5-11</sup> This symbolised Jesus rising from the dead—which happened on the same day that the priests were waving their sheaf of firstfruits! *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*<sup>1Cor.15:20</sup> But the main harvest began fifty days later when the priests gave an offering to God of two loaves made from the first of the grain harvested: *The day you brought the grain for the wave offering was the day after the Sabbath. Count off seven full weeks from that day. Count off 50 days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath. On that day bring me an offering of your first grain. Bring two loaves of bread that are made with 16 cups of fine flour. They must be baked with yeast. Bring them to me as a wave offering from the first share of your crops. That applies no matter where you live.*<sup>Lev.23:15-17</sup> So, at the same time as the priests were celebrating the beginning of the main harvest, God started His main harvest of souls by sending the Holy Spirit and converting people under the New Covenant! The harvest season continued until the Feast of Tabernacles when the Israelites were expected to spend 7 days in "booths" (tents) before returning to their permanent home, as a reminder that they were nomads for 40 years. *So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest... Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.*<sup>Lev.23:39-43</sup> And God's spiritual harvest will continue until Jesus returns at the **Final Resurrection** to lead us to our permanent (eternal) home. *Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*<sup>1Cor.5:1-5</sup>

When Peter said: "This is that" he meant that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy and it is **Harvest Time!** *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*<sup>Acts.2:21; Joel.2:32</sup> Right now we are in the main harvest time: *Jesus said, "My food is to do what my Father sent me to do. My food is to finish his work. You say, 'Four months more, and then it will be harvest time.' But I tell you, open your eyes! Look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest right now. Those who gather the crop are already getting paid. They are already harvesting the crop for eternal life. So those who plant and those who gather can now be glad together. Here is a true saying. 'One plants and another gathers.' I sent you to gather what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work. You have gathered the benefits of their work."*<sup>Jn.4:34-38</sup> But when Jesus returns, the harvest time will end—so let's keep on working while we can: *The Lord is not slow to keep his promise. He is not slow in the way some people understand it. He is patient with you. He doesn't want anyone to be destroyed. Instead, he wants all people to turn away from their sins.*<sup>2Pet.3:9</sup>



## Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Ps.19:7-14

*As Dave Smethurst is with us this week I have included an **Introduction to Philippians** and also a part of that Letter—read and be blessed!*

### Introduction to Philippians

This is Paul's happiest letter. And the happiness is infectious. Before we've read a dozen lines, we begin to feel the joy ourselves—the dance of words and the exclamations of delight have a way of getting inside us. But happiness is not a word we can understand by looking it up in the dictionary. In fact, none of the qualities of the Christian life can be learned out of a book. Something more like apprenticeship is required, being around someone who out of years of devoted discipline shows us, by his or her entire behaviour, what it is. Moments of verbal instruction will certainly occur, but mostly an apprentice acquires skill by daily and intimate association with a "*master*," picking up subtle but absolutely essential things, such as timing and rhythm and "*touch*."

When we read what Paul wrote to the Christian believers in the city of Philippi, we find ourselves in the company of just such a master. Paul doesn't tell us that we can be happy, or how to be happy. He simply and unmistakably **is happy**. None of his circumstances contribute to his joy: He wrote from a jail cell, his work was under attack by competitors, and after twenty years or so of hard traveling in the service of Jesus, he was tired and would have welcomed some relief. But circumstances are incidental compared to the life of Jesus, the Messiah, that Paul experiences from the inside. For it is a life that not only happened at a certain point in history, but continues to happen, spilling out into the lives of those who receive him, and then continues to spill out all over the place. Christ is, among much else, the revelation that God cannot be contained or hoarded. It is this "*spilling out*" quality of Christ's life that accounts for the happiness of Christians, for joy is life in excess, the overflow of what cannot be contained within any one person.

### A Love That Will Grow

Every time you cross my mind, I break out in exclamations of thanks to God. Each exclamation is a trigger to prayer. I find myself praying for you with a glad heart. I am so pleased that you have continued on in this with us, believing and proclaiming God's Message, from the day you heard it right up to the present. There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears. It's not at all fanciful for me to think this way about you. My prayers and hopes have deep roots in reality. You have, after all, stuck with me all the way from the time I was thrown in jail, put on trial, and came out of it in one piece. All along you have experienced with me the most generous help from God. He knows how much I love and miss you these days. Sometimes I think I feel as strongly about you as Christ does! So this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately. You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush. Live a lover's life, circumspect and exemplary, a life Jesus will be proud of: bountiful in fruits from the soul, making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God.

### Content Whatever the Circumstances

I'm glad in God, far happier than you would ever guess—happy that you're again showing such strong concern for me. Not that you ever quit praying and thinking about me. You just had no chance to show it. Actually, I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the



One who makes me who I am. I don't mean that your help didn't mean a lot to me—it did. It was a beautiful thing that you came alongside me in my troubles. You Philippians well know, and you can be sure I'll never forget it, that when I first left Macedonia province, venturing out with the Message, not one church helped out in the give-and-take of this work except you. You were the only one. Even while I was in Thessalonica, you helped out—and not only once, but twice. Not that I'm looking for handouts, but I do want you to experience the blessing that issues from generosity. And now I have it all—and keep getting more! The gifts you sent with Epaphroditus were more than enough, like a sweet-smelling sacrifice roasting on the altar, filling the air with fragrance, pleasing God no end. You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus. Our God and Father abounds in glory that just pours out into eternity. Yes. Give our regards to every Christian you meet.

## October

You people of God, have respect for the LORD. Those who respect Him have everything they need. Ps.34:9

### Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2018. Ps.20.

#### Christian Communion

We regularly remind ourselves that *we are not under the law but under grace*, however, the paragraph is not a licence to do what we want but about doing what God wants—about not sinning: *offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*<sup>Rom.6:13-18</sup>

Although we are not under law (*i.e.* we don't have to follow a list of rules to become a Christian or to live as a Christian), God does have standards that He expects us to adhere to. *I am the LORD... So be holy, because I am holy.*<sup>Lev.11:45</sup> God expected the Israelites to keep His guidance on how to live honourably and reverently as God's people—the *Law* or the *Covenant* (which we now call the *Old Covenant* because it has been superseded by the *New Covenant*). *Now obey me completely. Keep my covenant. If you do, then out of all of the nations you will be my special treasure. The whole earth is mine. But you will be a kingdom of priests to serve me. You will be my holy nation.*<sup>Ex.19:5-6</sup> And God expects us to keep the *New Covenant* so that we can live honourably and reverently as God's people. But the *New Covenant* is a heart-religion where our desire is as important as our deed: *You have heard what was said to people who lived long ago. They were told, 'Do not commit murder. Anyone who murders will be judged for it.' But here is what I tell you. Do not be angry with your brother. Anyone who is angry with his brother will be judged.*<sup>Matt.5:21-22</sup> (Actually, although the *Old Covenant* required strict adherence to the rituals and ceremonies, it was also a heart religion too: *Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.*<sup>Lev.19:17-18</sup>) But the *New Covenant* has superseded the old and enables us to worship God in spirit and truth: *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*<sup>Jn.4:23-24</sup> That's why the entrance into the *New Covenant* is the New Birth—until we have a new heart, we are still “*dead in our sins*” and separated from God: *You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.*<sup>Col.2:13-15</sup>

The *Old Covenant* was established through a sacrifice of a lamb whose blood was sprinkled on the people to show the seriousness and finality of the agreement: *Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."*<sup>Ex.24:8</sup> The *New Covenant* was also established through a sacrifice of a “*Lamb*”—**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**<sup>Jn.1:29</sup> *And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given*

for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”<sup>Lk.22:15-20</sup> Because Jesus did not officiate in a physical Temple but in heaven itself, His blood is not physically sprinkled on us like the blood of animals was sprinkled on people under the *Old Covenant*. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. That is why the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals. For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf.<sup>Heb.9:22-24</sup> But unlike the animals’ blood, Jesus’ blood (which represents His death) actually purifies our conscience so we can worship God: Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a *new covenant* between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins.<sup>Heb.9:14-15</sup> So, when we “break bread” together in the Communion meal of the *New Covenant*, we are reminding ourselves of what Jesus accomplished when He died—the forgiveness of sins which gives us a clear conscience so we can worship God. An easy way of remembering the reason for “breaking bread” is these **3 C’s: Commemoration, Communion and Consummation**.

**Commemoration:** we remember Jesus’ death: For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.” In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the *new covenant* between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.”<sup>1Cor.11:23-25</sup>

**Communion:** we remember we are in fellowship with Jesus and are sharing in the *New Covenant*: When we give thanks for the cup at the Lord’s Supper, aren’t we sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread, aren’t we sharing in the body of Christ? Just as there is one loaf, so we who are many are one body. We all eat from the one loaf.<sup>1Cor.10:16-17</sup> The word “communion” is κοινωνία, (*koinonia*) and means fellowship, participation, sharing. Here are some other uses of the word “communion”: because of your *partnership* in the gospel from the first day until now.<sup>Phil.1:5</sup> and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s *partners*.<sup>Lk.5:10</sup> God, who has called you into *fellowship* with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.<sup>1Cor.1:9</sup>

**Consummation:** we remember that we are only eating this meal until Jesus returns: For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.<sup>1Cor.11:26</sup> We are **not** “animists” who think that God inhabits objects—**God inhabits Believers:** The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.<sup>Acts.17:24</sup> Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?<sup>1Cor.3:16</sup> Christ in you, the hope of glory.<sup>Col.1:27</sup> God’s Presence is not in the Bread and Wine of Communion but in each Believer through the abiding Person of the Holy Spirit: I will ask the Father. And he will give you another Friend to help you and to be with you forever. The Friend is the Spirit of truth. The world can’t accept him. That is because the world does not see him or know him. But you know him. He lives with you, and he will be in you.<sup>Jn.14:16-17</sup>

Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, not by ritual, so let’s come reverently and gratefully to Him who feeds us on the Bread of Heaven. Eating bread is so natural and simple that even a child can eat, so as we eat, let’s reach out to Jesus with gratitude and reverence, remembering what He has done for us through the *New Covenant*. We are cleansed already so we don’t come for a new cleansing, but as we open our mouths, let’s consciously open our hearts to Him and accept the blessings of the *New Covenant*.

## Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2018. Ps.21. Acts 3

### What I have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth... Acts.3:6

We can only give what we have—otherwise we are either lying or stealing! Other than our sin and fallen nature, everything we have was given to us from God: *You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.*<sup>Deut.8:17-18</sup> Perhaps the only exception to this is our gratitude! *When one of them saw that he was healed, he turned back and praised God in a loud voice. He quickly bowed at Jesus' feet and thanked him. (The man was a Samaritan.) Jesus asked, ‘Weren't ten men made clean? Where are the other nine? Only this foreigner came back to praise God.’ Jesus told the man, ‘Get up, and go home! Your faith has made you well.’*<sup>Lk.17:15-19</sup>

### So, what do we have that we can give to others?

**Every Christian has Christ to give to others because Christ is in us**—that’s what makes us a Christian! *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?*<sup>2Cor.13:5</sup> Jesus was given the name **Emmanuel** because it means that **God is with us: and they will call him ‘Emmanuel’—which means, ‘God with us’.**<sup>Matt.1:23</sup> *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*<sup>Col.1:27</sup> When we became a Christian, we acknowledged Jesus was our Lord. *And without the help of the Holy Spirit no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord.’*<sup>1Cor.12:3</sup> *If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.*<sup>Rom.10:9-10</sup> To say that “Jesus is Lord” is to acknowledge Jesus is our Owner and Master. This means that everything we have really belongs to Jesus and has been given to us on loan. *We serve Christ. We are trusted with God's secret truth. Those who have been given a trust must prove that they are faithful.*<sup>1Cor.4:1-2</sup> *God created human beings; he created them godlike, Reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female. God blessed them: ‘Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.’*<sup>Gen.1:27-28</sup> We are stewards who have been given the charge of looking after God’s property responsibly and within the principles of His Kingdom as laid out in the Scriptures. God’s rules in the OT rules were for the OT but we are under the NT which has superseded the OT and made its rules obsolete.<sup>Heb.8:13</sup> But God’s principles don’t change—they are the same today as they were in the OT. And God’s character doesn’t change either—He has always been loving and compassionate: *The LORD, the LORD, a compassionate and merciful God, patient, always faithful and ready to forgive. He continues to show his love to thousands of generations, forgiving wrongdoing, disobedience, and sin.*<sup>Ex.34:6-7</sup> Now that we are born again, we are to live as God’s children—and especially like our Elder Brother, Jesus: *In this world we are like Jesus.*<sup>Jn.4:17</sup>

Many of our characteristics are genetically passed down to us from our parents, but most values and some characteristics are imparted to us from our family as we grow up. This is also true of our spiritual family—we inherit some characteristic from our heavenly Father when we are born-again, but most of our spiritual values and characteristics are imparted to us as we spend time with God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), His Word and His family. Before sending out His disciples, Jesus called them to Himself and then personally imparted His values to them: *Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.*<sup>Mk.3:13-15</sup> Paul was taught by Jesus before he taught others: *The good news I preached is not something a human being made up. No one gave it to me. No one taught it to me. Instead, I received it from Jesus Christ. He showed it to me.*<sup>Gal.1:11-12</sup> *I passed on to you what I received from the Lord.*<sup>1Cor.11:23</sup> *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.*<sup>2Tim.2:2</sup> We must also be taught by Jesus before we can give to others. We receive



from Jesus by spending time with Him through fellowship—that is by sharing time together in prayer, in study of the Scriptures and with other Believers.

**But how is Christ in us?** When Jesus ascended to heaven, He joined His Father in a position of authority: *“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. But he will come back in the same way you saw him go.”*<sup>Acts.1:11</sup> *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.*<sup>Col.3:1-4</sup> But although Jesus is in heaven, the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent, is quite literally within us: *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*<sup>Cor.6:19</sup> The 3 Persons of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—are one, a “tri-unity” and so united that although it is the Holy Spirit who resides within us, we can truthfully say that Jesus is also with us and that God the Father is also with us: *Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*<sup>Jn.14:23</sup>

Just as Jesus spent time with His 12 Disciples and taught them before sending them out, so the Holy Spirit spends time with us and teaches us: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*<sup>Acts.1:8</sup> *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*<sup>Ezek.36:26-27</sup> *The power to do what we do comes from God. He has given us the power to serve under a new covenant. The covenant is not based on the written Law of Moses. It comes from the Holy Spirit.*<sup>2Cor.3:5</sup> Although the Holy Spirit motivates, counsels, and empowers us through our spirit and our conscience, we must reciprocate His fellowship. *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature 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.*<sup>Gal.5:24-26</sup> However, if we continually resist the Holy Spirit, our conscience can be seared: *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*<sup>1Tim.4:1-3</sup> *You people! You won't obey! You are stubborn! You won't listen! You are just like your people of long ago! You always oppose the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your people didn't try to hurt? They even killed those who told about the coming of the Righteous One.*<sup>Acts.7:51-52</sup> The Jews thought they were honouring God when they persecuted the Church, and Gamaliel told them they were fighting God: *but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.*<sup>Acts.5:39</sup> Paul was convinced that he was doing God's will by killing Christians, but Jesus told him he was opposing Him! *“Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” “Who are you, lord?” Saul asked. And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!”*<sup>Acts.9:4-5</sup> *I was well trained by Gamaliel in the law of our people. I wanted to serve God as much as any of you do today. I hurt the followers of the Way of Jesus. I sent many of them to their death.*<sup>Acts.22:3-4</sup> Zeal and enthusiasm are good but they can also be dangerous when misdirected: *Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*<sup>Rom.10:1-3</sup> If we are to stay on God's paths of righteousness, we must balance the leading of the Holy Spirit in our conscience with the leading of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures. *Also, let Christ's peace control you. God has called you into this peace by bringing you into one body. Be thankful. Let Christ's word with all its wisdom and richness live in you. Use psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to teach and instruct yourselves about God's kindness. Sing to God in your hearts.*<sup>Col.3:15-16</sup> We can trust the Holy

Spirit's leading because He is God and will lead us into truth. *But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears. And he will tell you what is still going to happen. He will bring me glory by receiving something from me and showing it to you.*<sup>Jn.16:13-14</sup> And the Holy Spirit will never contradict what He has recorded in Scripture, so we must aim to be Bible literate—to understand what the Bible really says rather than what tradition has conditioned us to accept: *The Bereans were very glad to receive Paul's message. They studied the Scriptures carefully every day. They wanted to see if what Paul said was true. So they were more noble than the Thessalonians.*<sup>Acts17:11</sup> In the past God overlooked people's ignorance, but now Jesus has shown us what God is really like, we have no excuse for bad behaviour or for opposing God. *God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.*<sup>Acts.17:30-31</sup> But people still need to hear about God's Kingdom and they still need to have explained to them how their sins are forgiven. *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*<sup>Lk.24:45-49</sup> **Jesus' Commission is our Mission:** *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*<sup>Matt.28:18-19</sup> God expects us to point others to Christ, to teach them and impart His values to them—this is our work! *The sacred writings contain preliminary reports by the prophets on God's Son. His descent from David roots him in history; his unique identity as Son of God was shown by the Spirit when Jesus was raised from the dead, setting him apart as the Messiah, our Master. Through him we received both the generous gift of his life and the urgent task of passing it on to others who receive it by entering into obedient trust in Jesus.*<sup>Rom.1:2-5</sup> *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.*<sup>Phile.1:6</sup>

**What have we got to give to others? We have Christ, God's Anointed One.**

**So let's keep giving God's Anointing—Christ's presence in us—to others in word and deed, from our lips and through our lives!**

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2018 Ps.103:1-5. Acts 4**

**True Christian Unity: All the believers were one in heart and mind.**<sup>Acts.4:32</sup>

The Israelites were called "*the Children of Israel*" because they were just that—the descendants of the patriarch Israel (previously known as Jacob). When they left Egypt, their status changed from disorganised slaves to an organised society and from a horde of nobodies to a holy nation—but they were still the children of Israel and so they were one large family. The record of their history recorded in Scripture was written to teach us how we Believers—the family of God and followers of Christ—should live. *Everything written long ago was written to teach us so that we would have confidence through the endurance and encouragement which the Scriptures give us.*<sup>Rom.15:5</sup> When Israel was emancipated from slavery and established as a nation, it illustrated the emancipation of Believers—of us being emancipated from spiritual slavery and being established as a holy nation. *But God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a people who belong to God. All of this is so that you can sing his praises. He brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people. But now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy. But now you have received mercy.*<sup>1Pet.2:9-10</sup> It is we Believers who are God's family—people He chose before the world was even created: *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.*<sup>Eph.1:4-5</sup> And because we are God's family, we have been blessed with every blessing that heaven has to offer: *Praise the*

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer.<sup>Eph.1:3</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.<sup>Ps.103:1-5</sup>

Believers have at least 5 spiritual common denominators: **we have the same Father; Saviour; Spirit; Scriptures; Stop** (heaven)! When we were “born-again,” God became our heavenly Father and we became the children of God: *But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.*<sup>Jn.1:12-13</sup> Jesus became our Elder Brother. *So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters.*<sup>Heb.2:11</sup>

We were anointed (authorised and empowered) by the Holy Spirit: *But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you.*<sup>1Jn.2:27</sup> *Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.*<sup>2Tim.1:14</sup> We also have the Scriptures to teach us about God and we will join God in heaven after we die! With so much in common it should be easy

for Believers to be of “one heart and mind” but unfortunately, we still have the capacity to live as “mere humans” rather than as “sons of God”. *Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?.*<sup>1Cor.3:1-4</sup> Before we were converted,

our nature was opposed to God and we resisted Him rather than respected Him—and even though we may have been kind and morally good, we were blind to spiritual truths. *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.*<sup>1Cor.2:14</sup> But when we were converted, we were redeemed from that futile life of ignoring God.

*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*<sup>1Pet.1:18-19</sup> But it is easy for us to slip back into that old way of thinking because our minds can still remember that life of focusing on our own will instead of God's will—of ignoring God. *They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. These people are still the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them. But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit.*<sup>Jude.1:18-20</sup>

Now we are Believers, we need to renew our minds and follow the Holy Spirit's instructions, so we don't follow our old natural instincts. *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.*<sup>Rom.12:2</sup> This “renewing of our minds” is “spiritual warfare” where we fight against influences that would harm our spiritual health. The primary weapon in our spiritual armoury is the **Word of God**—which is also called the “Sword of the Spirit”.

*Put on the helmet of salvation. And take the sword of the Holy Spirit. The sword is God's word.*<sup>Eph.6:17</sup> *The word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any sword that has two edges. It cuts deep enough to separate the soul from spirit. It can separate joints from bones. It judges the thoughts and purposes of the heart. Nothing God created is hidden from him. His eyes see everything. He will hold us accountable for everything we do.*<sup>Heb.4:12-13</sup> And the battle is in our mind and for our mind—which is why we must fight every thought that ignores God and make it obedient to Christ. We do this by reminding ourselves of God's Word through reading the Scriptures, by thinking, pondering and absorbing their values, by basing our prayers on them, by sharing what we believe about them with others. We replace our thoughts that



ignore God with thoughts that are influenced by God: *Of course we are human, but we don't fight like humans. The weapons we use in our fight are not made by humans. Rather, they are powerful weapons from God. With them we destroy people's defences, that is, their arguments and all their intellectual arrogance that oppose the knowledge of God. We take every thought captive so that it is obedient to Christ.*<sup>1Cor.10:3-5</sup> However, if we are to succeed in the battle for our spiritual health, we must have the motivation to overcome—to fight and win rather than give up. Our motivation to be overcomers should be our love and loyalty to God and also our respect and reverence for Him, knowing that He wants to say “*well done, good and faithful servant*” to us when we finish our battle. **And if we live in harmony with Him and continue to be overcomers, we will hear God say “well done, good and faithful servant” to us.** (Remember it is our faith that causes us to overcome: *for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*<sup>1Jn.5:4-5</sup>)

Jesus lived His life in harmony with His Father and submitted to His will: “*May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” And we too should live our lives in harmony with our Heavenly Father and submit to His will! But not only should we live in harmony with God, we should also live in harmony with God’s family as well: *How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony! For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe. Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting.*<sup>P.s.133:1-3</sup>

However, to live in harmony with God and His family has a cost—and that cost is the cost of losing our old life. **But in return, we gain a new life.** Although this new life includes the **discipline of serving God** (sometimes at the loss of our own comfort and pleasure), it also includes the **joy of serving God**: *You always show me the path that leads to life. You will fill me with joy when I am with you. You will give me endless pleasures at your right hand.*<sup>P.s.16:11</sup> In our natural family we willingly give up time, sleep and money for the sake of our children—and often at the cost of our personal comfort and pleasure—so why should it be different in our spiritual family? *I am a prisoner because of the Lord. So I am asking you to live a life worthy of what God chose you for. Don't be proud at all. Be completely gentle. Be patient. Put up with one another in love. The Holy Spirit makes you one in every way. So try your best to remain as one. Let peace keep you together. There is one body. There is one Spirit. You were appointed to one hope when you were chosen. There is one Lord. There is one faith and one baptism. There is one God and Father of all. He is over everything. He is through everything. He is in everything. But each one of us has received a gift of grace, just as Christ wanted us to have it.*<sup>Eph.4:1-7</sup>

**Unity is not the same as uniformity!** We are individuals with individually unique giftings. *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body.*<sup>1Cor.12:12-13</sup> And we can be united without being identical; we can live in harmony without hurting; we can be different without being divisive. *I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.*<sup>1Cor.1:10</sup> But unity takes grace and humility: *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*<sup>Rom.15:5-7</sup> *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*<sup>Rom.12:16</sup>

Although our unity comes from our shared identity as the children of God, **the way we keep our unity is to work together in the shared mission of Christ’s Commission**: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*<sup>Mat.28:18-19</sup> And as we fulfil our Master’s Commission **together**, we will find it easy live in the **unity** that God has purposed for us and that Jesus prayed for us: *Father, I pray that all of them will be one, just as you*



are in me and I am in you. I want them also to be in us. Then the world will believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me. I did this so they would be one, just as we are one. I will be in them, just as you are in me. I want them to be brought together perfectly as one. This will let the world know that you sent me. It will also show the world that you have loved those you gave me, just as you have loved me.<sup>Jn.17:21-23</sup> **To be of one heart and mind with God and His family is true Christian unity! Living like this is the blessed way to live and also the best way to live!** So, let's walk along God's "tracks of righteousness" together and then goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life.<sup>Ps.23</sup>

## **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2018 Ps.23. Acts 5**

### **We must obey God rather than men!**<sup>Acts.5:29</sup>

The Church was birthed in the expectation that all Believers were **Jesus' witnesses**—that they could (and would) testify that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus rose from the dead and that Jesus is the only way of salvation. *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*<sup>Acts.1:8</sup> The Greek word for "witness" is μαρτυρῶς (*martus*) and means "someone who has information or knowledge of something, and so they are able to confirm it". Because so many of these "witnesses" who testified that Jesus was the Christ were persecuted to the point of death for their testimony, the Greek word for witness (*martus*) became our English word "martyr" meaning "someone who is persecuted or killed for their religious belief". *They overcame him [the accuser of the brethren] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*<sup>Rev.21:11</sup> The early Christians accepted the cost of testifying that Jesus was God's Son—of being a witness—and, like Moses hundreds of years before, they preferred God's commendation to this world's comfort: *He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward.*<sup>Heb.11:25-26</sup> However, the seed of Stephen's faith—watered with his blood—produced a harvest of righteousness and within a short (albeit troublesome) time, Paul, one of Stephen's murderers was converted and became perhaps the highest profile witness the Church has ever had. But Jesus had told Paul that being His witness would involve a lot of suffering—and it did! (see 2Cor:6:4-10;11:16-33): *This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.*<sup>Acts.9:15-16</sup> After Paul's conversion the Church had a few years of relative calm until James was martyred under orders from Herod Agrippa. Persecution continued from the Jews and then also from the Romans—especially under Nero. The following account was written by the Roman historian Tacitus in his book *Annals* published a few years after the event: *Therefore, to stop the rumour [that he had set Rome on fire], he [Emperor Nero] falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most fearful tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were [generally] hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius, but the pernicious superstition—repressed for a time—broke out yet again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, whither all things horrible and disgraceful flow from all quarters, as to a common receptacle, and where they are encouraged. Accordingly, first those were arrested who confessed they were Christians; next on their information, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city, as of "hating the human race." In their very deaths they were made the subjects of sport: for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when the day waned, burned to serve for the evening lights. Nero offered his own garden players for the spectacle, and exhibited a Circensian game, indiscriminately mingling with the common people in the dress of a charioteer, or else standing in his chariot. For this cause a feeling of compassion arose towards the sufferers, though guilty and deserving of exemplary capital punishment, because they seemed not to be cut off for the public good, but were victims of the ferocity of one man.*

It was during Nero's persecution that Peter and Paul paid the ultimate price for their witness and were executed. And the persecution of Christians has continued throughout history. During the Reformation in the C16<sup>th</sup> the Anabaptists were persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants alike.

During the Reformation in the C16<sup>th</sup> the Anabaptists were persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants alike. Because "*rebaptism*" was punishable by death, and since the established Church considered the christening of infants as a "*baptism*", they were vindictive in their persecution resulting most Anabaptists being martyred within 18 months of their baptism as Believers! The Waldensians were Bible-believing Christians who lived in the French/Italian Alps and had been independent of the Catholic church since the C13<sup>th</sup>. In 1655 around 1,700 of them were slaughtered at the *Piedmont Easter Massacre* which was so brutal that it aroused indignation throughout Europe. Oliver Cromwell organised international action on their behalf by writing to the Governments involved and threatening military action against France by sending the Navy down to the Mediterranean. At home Cromwell called a "*day of solemn fasting and humiliation*" and organised collections for the relief of the surviving Waldensians—with a personal contribution of £2,000 out of his own funds!

The persecution of Christians continues and today there are more than 200 million Believers from over 50 countries, who experience high levels of persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. From November 2016 – October 2017 over 3,000 Christians were killed for their faith—more than twice as many as in the previous 12 months.

This heritage of heroes who have been faithful to the end should embolden us to obey God rather than man, especially when it comes to our own witness—our testimony that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus rose from the dead, and that Jesus is the only way of salvation. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.*<sup>Heb.12:1-2</sup>

Christianity involves following Christ and Christians have made a commitment to honour Christ with their lips **and** their lives—regardless of the consequences. And because this world is opposed to God, it is not surprising that society is often in conflict with God's people over spiritual principles! *Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.*<sup>Jas.4:4</sup> Life is made up of choices and the choices we make have consequences including punishment for doing wrong. If we exceed the speed limit (and get caught) we will have to pay a speeding fine; if we steal (and get caught) we will be punished with a fine or imprisonment—but we are rarely punished for doing right! However, if we are punished, it is better to be punished for doing right than for doing wrong! *Suppose people make fun of you because you believe in Christ. Then you are blessed, because God's Spirit rests on you. He is the Spirit of glory. Suppose you suffer. Then it shouldn't be because you are a murderer or a thief. It shouldn't be because you do evil things. It shouldn't be because you poke your nose into other people's business. But suppose you suffer for being a Christian. Then don't be ashamed. Instead, praise God because you are known by that name.*<sup>1Pet.4:14-16</sup> *Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!*<sup>1Pet.3:17</sup> Christianity is not about getting everything right but about God counting us right—and this happens when we place our trust and confidence in Him. *Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.*<sup>Rom.3:3</sup> But as James points out, faith as a theory is useless—it must be followed up with actions. *You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.*<sup>Jas.2:22-24</sup>

Jesus prayed for His oppressors: *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."*<sup>Lk.23:34</sup> Stephen prayed for His oppressors: *While the members of the Sanhedrin were throwing stones at Stephen, he prayed. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," he said. Then he fell on his knees. He cried out, "Lord! Don't hold this sin against them!" When he had said this, he died.*<sup>Acts.7:59-60</sup> If we are to live as God's children, we too must pray for those who oppose us: *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.*<sup>Matt.5:44-45</sup>

Although we should always do what is right, the most important thing we can do, is to place our trust in God: *Do not work for food that spoils. Work for food that lasts forever. That is the food the Son of Man will give you. God the Father has put his seal of approval on him.*" Then they asked him, "What does God want from us? What works does he want us to do?" Jesus answered, "God's work is to believe in the One he has sent."<sup>Jn.6:27-29</sup> But when we do what God wants, we should also do it in the way God wants—we should have the same attitude as Jesus: *But suppose you receive a beating for doing wrong, and you put up with it. Will anyone honour you for that? Of course not. But suppose you suffer for doing good, and you put up with it. God will praise you for that. Christ suffered for you. He left you an example. He expects you to follow in his steps. You too were chosen to suffer. Scripture says, "He didn't commit any sin. No lies ever came out of his mouth." People shouted at him and made fun of him. But he didn't do the same back to them. He suffered. But he didn't say that bad things would happen to them. Instead, he trusted in the One who judges fairly.*<sup>1Pet.2:20-23</sup> Just as God rewarded Jesus for His obedience, God will also reward us for our obedience: *There truly is a reward for those who live for God; surely there is a God who judges justly here on earth.*<sup>Ps.58:11</sup> So let's keep following the example of Jesus and our forefathers in the faith, emulating their example and preferring to honour God rather than gain mere man's admiration. **We must obey God rather than men!**<sup>Acts.5:29</sup>

## November

The lions may grow weak and hungry. But those who look to the LORD have every good thing they need. Ps.34:10

### Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Ps.24.

**How bright is your light?** *You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* <sup>Matt.5:14-16</sup>

We have emphasised that the purpose of the Bible is to reveal (explain) God's plan of salvation for mankind through Jesus Christ. There is no other way anyone can be saved (freed from the penalty and guilt of their sins) than through Jesus Christ: *By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the One you killed on a cross, the One God raised from the dead, by means of his name this man stands before you healthy and whole. Jesus is 'the stone you masons threw out, which is now the cornerstone.'* *Salvation comes no other way; no other name has been or will be given to us by which we can be saved, only this one.* <sup>Acts.4:10-12</sup>

This means that no religion can release us from our sins or give us peace with God—the Church can't, a priest can't, a religious ritual can't—only Jesus can forgive our sins and reconcile us to God. And as we saw last week, the early Church was birthed in the expectation that all Believers were **witnesses to the fact that Jesus is the only Redeemer.** They testified that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus rose from the dead and that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Their theology was tested very quickly and found to be true. And it is the same for us—we have the same theology, so for us to overcome the enemy's attacks we too must trust in Jesus' blood (the results of His redemptive death and resurrection), testify to that trust, AND ALSO put Jesus' reputation and honour before our own comfort or even life. *They overcame him [the accuser of the brethren] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.* <sup>Rev.21:11</sup> Today there are more than 200 million Believers from over 50 countries, who experience high levels of persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ, and over 3,000 Christians were killed for their faith last year.

Everything written in the Bible was written intentionally to enable us to see God's plan of salvation. John wrote his Gospel with this express purpose: *The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.* <sup>Jn.20:30-31</sup>

But is also true of the rest of the Bible: *Everything written long ago was written to teach us so that we would have confidence through the endurance and encouragement which the Scriptures give us. May God, who gives you this endurance and encouragement, allow you to live in harmony with each other by following the example of Christ Jesus.* <sup>Rom.15:4-5</sup> *Those things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who are living at the time when God's work is being completed. So be careful. When you think you are standing firm, you might fall.* <sup>1Cor.10:11-12</sup> So with the Creation story. Obviously, the Bible account of Creation is a very brief and incomplete record of how the world began. We aren't told how God created the world, just that God said: "let there be..."—and there was! We don't know how long creation took—whether seconds, hours, months, years or even millennia—we just accept that God created the world and everything in it: *By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.* <sup>Heb.11:3</sup> *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.* <sup>Jn.1:1-3</sup> But the Bible account of Creation was written to explain God's plan of salvation for mankind through Jesus Christ and so it points to the New Creation of Conversion and how we should live as Believers. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling*



the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.<sup>2Cor.5:17-19</sup> Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.<sup>Gal.6:15</sup>

The first thing God did after creating the heavens and the earth was to create light and separate light from darkness: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth didn't have any shape. And it was empty. Darkness was over the surface of the ocean. At that time, the ocean covered the earth. The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. God saw that the light was good. He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day." He called the darkness "night." There was evening, and there was morning. It was day one.*<sup>Gen.1:1-5</sup> This separation of light from the darkness was recorded to explain that there is a difference between God and the devil, between spiritual light and spiritual darkness, between believers and unbelievers. Jesus, who is the Light of the world, separates us from spiritual darkness: *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*<sup>Jn.8:12</sup> Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress... *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*<sup>Is.9:1-2</sup> This distinction of God's people and separation from the world was seen in Egypt leading up to the Exodus: *So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.*<sup>Ex.10:22-23</sup> And today there is a distinction between Believers and unbelievers—and the distinction is not just our destination but also our demeanour: *"They will belong to me," says the LORD who rules over all. "They will be my special treasure. I will spare them just as a loving father spares his son who serves him. Then once again you will see the difference between godly people and sinful people. And you will see the difference between those who serve me and those who do not.*<sup>Mal.3:17-18</sup> *I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.*<sup>Ecc.8:12-13</sup> *Don't you know that to be a friend of the world is to hate God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Don't you know what Scripture says? The spirit that God caused to live in us wants us to belong only to God.*<sup>Jas.4:4-5</sup>

God has redeemed us from the gloom of despair and despondency and brought us into His glorious light: *But God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a people who belong to God. All of this is so that you can sing his praises. He brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*<sup>1Pet.2:9</sup> So we are now no longer living in the "darkness" of ignorance of God but are living in the "light" of God's love: *Brothers and sisters, you are not in darkness. So that day should not surprise you as a thief would. All of you are children of the light. You are children of the day. We don't belong to the night. We don't belong to the darkness. So let us not be like the others. They are asleep. Instead, let us be wide awake and in full control of ourselves. Those who sleep, sleep at night. Those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But we belong to the day. So let us control ourselves.*<sup>1Thess.5:4-8</sup> So we have an obligation to live as children of light—as children of God: *At one time you were in the dark. But now you are in the light because of what the Lord has done. Live like children of the light. The light produces what is completely good, right and true. Find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the acts of darkness. They don't produce anything good. Show what they are really like. It is shameful even to talk about what people who don't obey do in secret. But everything the light shines on can be seen. Light makes everything clear. That is why it is said "Wake up, sleeper. Rise from the dead. Then Christ will shine on you." So be very careful how you live.*<sup>Eph.5:8-15</sup> We also have an obligation to help others see God's light: *I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*<sup>Acts.26:17-18</sup>

John the Baptist was a witness to Jesus the light: *The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John*

himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.<sup>1Jn.1:4-9</sup> We too are a witness to Jesus the light because His life is now in us and we are also the light of the world: *You are the light of the world.*<sup>Matt.5:14</sup>

**So how bright is your light?** Your light (your witness to Jesus' life within you) is as bright as you want it to be: *Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*<sup>Matt.5:14-16</sup> Yes, we are different from the world because we belong to God who is light: *This is the message we heard from Christ and are reporting to you: God is light, and there isn't any darkness in him. If we say, "We have a relationship with God" and yet live in the dark, we're lying. We aren't being truthful. But if we live in the light in the same way that God is in the light, we have a relationship with each other. And the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from every sin.*<sup>1Jn.1:5-7</sup> Let's continue to enjoy God and live in His light, then we can enjoy the blessings of His house—the blessing of sins forgiven; the blessing of peace in our soul; the blessing of the companionship of the Holy Spirit; the blessing of being part of the family of God (wherever we are and wherever we go). *They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*<sup>Ps.36:8-9</sup>

**Remembrance Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Ps.25:1-10 Acts 6**

**Full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.**<sup>Acts.6:5</sup>

When internal difficulties first arose in the Church, the apostles looked for people who were *full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.*<sup>Acts.6:5</sup> This phrase "*full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*" is not just an ideal or a goal but should be the standard for ALL Believers not just certain "*spiritual*" people. Walkers walk; runners run; swimmers swim; and so believers believe—it's that simple! If we are not believing, then we are not a Believer! However, we don't become mature in our faith until our **trust is tested**. Sometimes we will fail—**BUT WE PICK OURSELVES UP AND CONTINUE ONWARDS AND UPWARDS!** *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*<sup>Phil.3:12-14</sup> Actually, we learn to trust God more when we fail because we see God intervening in our lives through His care, provision and protection—**when we didn't deserve it!** When we remember how God was with us and cared for us in difficult situations, our confidence in Him grows—and when we face our next difficulty it is easy to trust God. *We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.*<sup>2Cor.4:7-10</sup> Our faith becomes a tried and tested trust that is based on both scripture and experience. *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*<sup>Jas.1:2-4</sup> *And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*<sup>1Pet.1:5-7</sup> God told Isaiah to tell the people: *Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you*

walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.<sup>Is.43:1-3</sup> So, as Believers, we can say with David: *Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me.*<sup>Ps.23:4</sup>

Until Jesus came, God was either known by His actions (which were mostly judgement) or His personal communication (which was often to just one person in a generation, such as: *the Word of the Lord came to...* ). The Bible was still being written and so any understanding of God was at best incomplete, which meant that faith (a personal trust in God) was much harder—although there were many who did believe (see Hebrews chapter 11). But when Jesus was born—when the Word became human—it became much easier to believe and trust in God because He could be seen, touched and heard. *Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honour at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names.*<sup>Heb.1:1-3</sup>

Although Jesus was born as a human, it was a long time ago and stories get exaggerated, myths develop, memories fail—so we need a better point of reference than just stories handed down from generation to generation. That is why God organised people to write about the events, revelations, and instructions—within the lifetime of the people concerned, so it could be verified by those who witnessed it. *Many have attempted to write about what had taken place among us. They received their information from those who had been eyewitnesses and servants of God's word from the beginning, and they passed it on to us. I, too, have followed everything closely from the beginning. So I thought it would be a good idea to write an orderly account... In this way you will know that what you've been told is true.*<sup>Lk.1:1-4</sup>

But even though those eye-witness accounts were valid, God put another dimension into their writings to make them Scripture—He inspired the writings by the Holy Spirit: *We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty... And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*<sup>2Pet.1:16-21</sup> When God breathed His Spirit into the writings of Scripture, He put spiritual life within them so the very words have the intrinsic ability to save people—to give them eternal life: *You have known the Holy Scriptures ever since you were a little child. They are able to teach you how to be saved by believing in Christ Jesus. God has breathed life into all of Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, a man of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing.*<sup>2Tim.3:15-17</sup>

Jesus is the Living Word of God and is God Incarnate—God in human form—but Scripture is the Written Word of God and is God Inspired. This means that the Scriptures **contain** God's life and so they can be translated into other languages without affecting the spiritual content. This is true even if the translation is not completely accurate (actually it is impossible to accurately translate something from one language into another because of different sentence structures, idioms, etc.). As the angel said to Mary: *For no word from God shall be void of power.*<sup>Lk.1:37</sup> (This the literal translation of the verse and is found in the ASV; most other translations have: *Nothing is impossible with God.*) What the angel was actually saying to Mary was: **every word from God has intrinsic power within it to achieve what God wants it to.** *The rain and the snow come down from the sky. They do not return to it without watering the earth. They make plants come up and grow. The plants produce seeds for farmers. They also produce food for people to eat. The words I speak are like*

that. They will not return to me without producing results. They will accomplish what I want them to. They will do exactly what I sent them to do.<sup>Is.55:10-11</sup> It is the Word of God—both Jesus the Living Word and Jesus within the Written Word—that produces faith (the simple confident trust in God): *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? ... The point is, Before you trust, you have to listen. But unless Christ's Word is preached, there's nothing to listen to.*<sup>Rom.10:14-17</sup> This is why we must encourage one another from the Scriptures: *Everything written long ago was written to teach us so that we would have confidence through the endurance and encouragement which the Scriptures give us. May God, who gives you this endurance and encouragement, allow you to live in harmony with each other by following the example of Christ Jesus.*<sup>Rom.15:4-5</sup> But just studying the Scriptures or even sharing the Scriptures is not enough—we need the Holy Spirit to apply those Scriptures, because the Scripture is spiritual—it is about spiritual matters. *Whoever knows what you're thinking and planning except you yourself? The same with God—except that he not only knows what he's thinking, but he lets us in on it. God offers a full report on the gifts of life and salvation that he is giving us. We don't have to rely on the world's guesses and opinions. We didn't learn this by reading books or going to school; we learned it from God, who taught us person-to-person through Jesus, and we're passing it on to you in the same first-hand, personal way. The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There's no capacity for them. They seem like so much silliness. Spirit can be known only by spirit—God's Spirit and our spirits in open communion. Spiritually alive, we have access to everything God's Spirit is doing, and can't be judged by unspiritual critics. Isaiah's question, "Is there anyone around who knows God's Spirit, anyone who knows what he is doing?" has been answered: Christ knows, and we have Christ's Spirit.*<sup>1Cor.2:11-16</sup>

Let's strive to continue to be **full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.**<sup>Acts.6:5</sup> Then like Stephen, we will be a good witness to Jesus and speak with wisdom and beauty from the Holy Spirit: *they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke... All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*<sup>Acts.6:10-15</sup>

## **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Ps.25:10-22 Acts 7**

**Look! I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.**<sup>Acts.7:56</sup>

The word "heaven" in our Bible is used of the created skies and space and also of the uncreated, eternal dwelling place of God—and the two are quite different and distinct. The first thing God created was the heavens and the earth—then He moulded them and made them to function: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth didn't have any shape. And it was empty.*<sup>Gen.1:1-2</sup> *So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed.*<sup>Gen.2:1</sup> These "heavens" can mean outer space: *And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so.*<sup>Gen.1:14-15</sup> *I think about the heavens. I think about what your fingers have created. I think about the moon and stars that you have set in place.*<sup>Ps.8:3</sup> And "heaven" can also mean the earth's atmosphere—the sky: *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven.*<sup>Is.55:10</sup> *But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land.*<sup>Lk.4:25</sup>

But the usual definition of "heaven" is the uncreated place where God dwells: *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*<sup>Matt.3:16-17</sup> God dwells in heaven with His angels: *Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said, "May glory be given to God in the highest heaven! And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!" The angels left and went into heaven.*<sup>Lk.2:13-15</sup> *An angel from heaven appeared to Jesus and gave him strength.*<sup>Lk.22:34</sup> We also know that the devil is not in heaven any more: *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the*



power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.<sup>Rev.12:10</sup> Although we don't know much about the devil, we have no need to fear his power or even his person because our names are recorded in heaven: Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to walk all over snakes and scorpions. You will be able to destroy all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. But do not be glad when the evil spirits obey you. Instead, be glad that your names are written in heaven."<sup>Lk.10:18-20</sup>

The kingdom of heaven is God's kingdom, and when Jesus began His ministry, He preached the Good News of God's kingdom: Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"<sup>Mk.1:14-15</sup> Most of Jesus' ministry was spent explaining what God's kingdom was like: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sows good seed... is like a mustard seed... is like yeast.<sup>Matt.13</sup>

When Jesus taught about heaven, He also taught how we can go there to be with Him and His Father. For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.<sup>Jn.6:38-40</sup> What I'm about to tell you is true. We speak about what we know. We give witness to what we have seen. But still you people do not accept our witness. I have spoken to you about earthly things, and you do not believe. So how will you believe if I speak about heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from heaven. He is the Son of Man.<sup>Jn.3:11-13</sup> Jesus often taught by telling stories so people could understand about God's kingdom: The disciples came up and asked, "Why do you tell stories?" He replied, "You've been given insight into God's kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn't been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That's why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight."<sup>Matt.13:10-13</sup>

Jesus also demonstrated the kingdom of heaven by helping people: Jesus travelled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.<sup>Matt.4:23</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.<sup>Acts 10:36-38</sup>

God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom because God is Spirit and heaven is a spiritual place (i.e. heaven is not physical or political). Probably the best definition of God's kingdom is "the rule of Christ in our heart". "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."<sup>Lk.17:20-21</sup>

So God's heavenly kingdom is already here on earth: The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.<sup>Rev.11:15</sup> But not everything is in submission to Jesus—yet! However, when Jesus returns, all will submit to His authority and death itself will finally be destroyed: Christ is the first of those who rise from the dead. When he comes back, those who belong to him will be raised. Then the end will come. Christ will destroy all rule, authority and power. He will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. Christ must rule until he has put all his enemies under his control. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.<sup>1Cor.15:23-26</sup>

Until then, we should pray that God's will is done here on earth as it is in heaven: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>Matt.6:9-10</sup>

Some people imagine that God has shut heaven up and so their prayers don't reach Him—and they usually (mis)quote: And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. Jehovah will make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed.<sup>Dent.28:23-24</sup> But even a cursory look at this verse shows that this "heaven" is the sky not the place where God dwells: The sky over your head will be bronze. And the context is rebellion and disobedience! However, if you **do not** obey the LORD your God and **do not** carefully

follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.<sup>Deut.28:15-16</sup> Rebellion and disobedience are not marks of a Believer! A Believer's testimony is: *But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Saviour.*<sup>Phil.3:20</sup> Jesus explained that He was the Door (*I am the door; whoever enters through me will be saved.*<sup>Jn:10:9</sup>) and that heaven is now open for Disciples: *Then he said to the disciples, "What I'm about to tell you is true. You will see heaven open. You will see the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man."*<sup>Jn.1:51</sup> This was reminiscent of Jacob's vision, hundreds of years before: *In a dream he saw a stairway standing on the earth. Its top reached to heaven. The angels of God were going up and coming down on it. The LORD stood above the stairway. He said, "I am the LORD."*<sup>Gen.28:12-13</sup> We have an open access to God because Jesus has returned to heaven: *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... 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.*<sup>Heb.4:14-16</sup>

Yes, heaven is where God dwells, but Jesus has brought heaven down to us—so we don't have to wait until we die to experience God's presence and neither do we have to go on a pilgrimage to find God: *But faith's way of getting right with God says, "Don't say in your heart, 'Who will go up to heaven?' (to bring Christ down to earth). And don't say, 'Who will go down to the place of the dead?' (to bring Christ back to life again)." In fact, it says, "The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart." And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.*<sup>Rom.10:6-10</sup> Paul had an incredible experience of God's heaven that gave him a personal insight into the spiritual realities: *I know a believer in Christ who was taken up to the third heaven 14 years ago. I don't know if his body was taken up or not. Only God knows. I don't know if that man was in his body or out of it. Only God knows. But I do know that he was taken up to paradise. He heard things that couldn't be put into words. They were things that people aren't allowed to talk about.*<sup>2Cor.12:2-4</sup>

John also had an insight into God's heaven: *Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.'* And instantly I was in the Spirit.<sup>Rev.4:1-2</sup> We too can experience the spiritual realities of heaven when, like John, we are "in the Spirit", that is, as we saw last week, *full of faith and the Holy Spirit.*<sup>Acts.6:5</sup> Then, like Stephen, we too can see God's glory in heaven: *But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."*<sup>Acts.7:55-56</sup>

## **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Ps.26 Acts 8**

### **The Spirit told Philip...**<sup>Acts.8:29</sup>

Last week we saw that heaven is now open—just as Jesus said: *Then he said to the disciples, "What I'm about to tell you is true. You will see heaven open. You will see the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man."*<sup>Jn.1:51</sup> Heaven is now open because Jesus has returned to heaven and He is there interceding for us: *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... 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.*<sup>Heb.4:14-16</sup> Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.<sup>Rom.8:34</sup>

That means our prayer reach God because there is no blockage between us and heaven—God hears our prayer and He answers us. This heaven is not the sky, nor the earth's atmosphere, nor even outer space—it is the dwelling place of God. God's heaven is not a geographical place—it is a spiritual place and so you can't see it from earth or space or anywhere. Heaven is

where God dwells: *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*<sup>2Matt.3:16-17</sup> Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said, "May glory be given to God in the highest heaven! And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!" The angels left and went into heaven.<sup>Lk.2:13-15</sup>

Because God is Spirit, He communicates with us spiritually—and we communicate with Him spiritually: *God is spirit. His worshipers must worship him in spirit and in truth.*<sup>Jn.4:24</sup> Every human being is spiritually dead (separated from God) when they are born into this world—and until they are spiritually re-born they are not able to commune with God. They can praise Him (say good things about Him) and ask Him for help but they can't worship God because they don't have any relationship with Him. *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient... But God loves us deeply. He is full of mercy. So he gave us new life because of what Christ has done. He gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God's grace has saved you. God raised us up with Christ. He has seated us with him in his heavenly kingdom because we belong to Christ Jesus.*<sup>Eph.2:1-</sup>

<sup>6</sup>*That is why the New-Birth is essential: Jesus replied, "What I'm about to tell you is true. No one can see God's kingdom without being born again."*<sup>Jn.3:3</sup> No religion, no Church, no action, no person can ever make anyone into a Christian—but true religion, the Church, actions and people all play a part in bringing us to the place where we hear the Holy Spirit speak to us and where we can receive the Gospel—the good news that Jesus has opened the way for us to access heaven. The Holy Spirit is sovereign, so He can work however He chooses to, and although He normally uses people to explain the gospel (that's why Jesus commissioned us to "go and make disciples"), He **always convinces** (convicts) people of their sin and **reveals Jesus** as their Saviour. *When he comes, he'll expose the error of the godless world's view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: He'll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted. I still have many things to tell you, but you can't handle them now. But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won't draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said. He will honour me; he will take from me and deliver it to you.*<sup>Jn.16:8-14</sup>

God does not coerce us from outside but sets us free from within. When we are born again, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us and becomes joined to our own spirit. *But anyone who is joined to the Lord becomes one with him in spirit... your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is in you. You have received him from God.*<sup>1Cor.6:17-19</sup> *You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*<sup>Rom.8:9-11</sup>

With the Holy Spirit residing within us, communicating with us, teaching us and guiding us, we are able to know God and even hear from God: *We have received the Spirit who is from God. The Spirit helps us understand what God has freely given us. That is what we speak about. We don't use words taught to us by people. We use words taught to us by the Holy Spirit. We use the words of the Spirit to teach the truths of the Spirit. 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... But we have the mind of Christ.*<sup>1Cor.2:12-16</sup> However, we still have to **choose to obey God**—but even obedience becomes easy because God gives us the **desire to obey Him** by writing His laws on our hearts: *This is the covenant I will establish with the people of*

Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.<sup>Heb.8:10</sup>

When someone becomes a Christian, their priority is to know Jesus personally and intimately, so that they can obediently follow Him and experience all the blessings God that has for us Believers: *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*<sup>Eph.1:17-19</sup> In any relationship, the most important factor is time. When we spend time with someone, we get to know their likes and dislikes, their passions, their joys, hurts, their family—we get to know them as a person. After a while, we get to recognise their voice and their mannerisms—time spent together develops into trust. So it is with God! When we spend time with Him, we get to recognise God's likes and dislikes, His passions, His joys, His family—we get to know Him a Person. We spend time with God by reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping God **personally** and also by reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping God **collectively** (*i.e.* together with other believers—which is called *fellowship*). When we pray and praise, we speak to God and when we study (read, reflect and recall) the Bible, God speaks to us. By praying, praising and studying with other Believers (and especially within the security of a Church, where there is accountability and credibility) we get to recognise God's voice for our self: *He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice.*<sup>Jn.10:3-5</sup>

With so many different opinions and ideas being promoted, it is essential for us to recognise God's voice, especially when it comes to doctrine and morality. Sadly, not all who think they hear God's voice, actually do hear from Him—most are simply naïve and mistake their imagination for God's leading (although some are obviously deceived). In order for us to stay true to God and His values, we must filter everything (including what we believe God is saying to us) through the basic principles of the New Covenant and general teaching of Scripture: *In the past, God spoke to our people through the prophets. He spoke at many times. He spoke in different ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us through his Son.*<sup>Heb.1:1-2</sup> **But when we stay in fellowship we will never wander too far off the tracks of righteousness.**<sup>Ps.23:3</sup> **Fellowship** means participating, partnering and sharing together and our fellowship includes **Fellowship with God**: *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.*<sup>1Jn.1:5-6</sup> **Fellowship with God's Word** (the Living Word—Jesus **and** the written Word—the Scriptures): *Tell them, "No, we're going to study the Scriptures." People who try the other ways get nowhere—they are completely in the dark.*<sup>1s.8:20</sup> and **Fellowship with God's people** (especially with those who don't quite see eye-to-eye with us): *Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.*<sup>Pron.15:22</sup> *A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment defies all sound judgment).*<sup>Pron.18:1</sup> *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*<sup>1Jn.1:7</sup>

The Holy Spirit is our Teacher and He is the best Teacher—He will never lead us into error but only into truth, so we can trust Him: *Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. You didn't receive a spirit that makes you a slave to fear once again. Instead you received the Holy Spirit, who makes you God's child. By the Spirit's power we call God "Abba." Abba means Father. The Spirit himself joins with our spirits. Together they give witness that we are God's children. As his children, we will receive all that he has for us. We will share what Christ receives. But we must share in his sufferings if we want to share in his glory.*<sup>Rom.8:14-17</sup>



When the Holy Spirit spoke to Philip, he immediately obeyed and another soul was saved: *The Holy Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot. Stay near it." So Philip ran up to the chariot.*<sup>Acts.8:29-30</sup> As we learn to recognise God's leading and promptly obey, we will see God use us in wonderful ways to spread the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven.

## December

**My children, come. Listen to me. I will teach you to have respect for the LORD.** Ps.34:11

### Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2018. Ps.27:1-8

#### Believers, Bibles and Battles.

Last month was the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armistice with Germany following WW1. Although the Armistice was signed on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918, a formal state of war persisted until after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles with Germany on 28 June 1919. Eventually, the state of war between the United Kingdom and Germany ceased on 10 January 1920—14 months after the Armistice was signed! To commemorate the anniversary of the Armistice, we gave out replicas of the John's Gospel that were distributed to the WW1 soldiers by the Scripture Gift Mission. In the front of these Gospels there is this inscription from Lord Roberts: *"I ask you to put your trust in God. He will watch over you and strengthen you. You will find in this little book guidance when you are in health, comfort when you are in sickness, and strength when you are in adversity."* At the back are some hymns and a prayer with a decision form, with space to write your name in. Over the last 3 weeks, we have read some of the soldier's testimonies of how the Bible brought them help, comfort and solace during the war.

It was during WW1 that the military chaplain in its current form began, although England had military-oriented chaplains on board proto-naval vessels during the C8<sup>th</sup>. Land-based chaplains appeared in the C13<sup>th</sup> during the reign of King Edward I. However, providing spiritual help to soldiers and others in times of trauma, has been around for much longer. In Moses' time, the priests were always at the fore-front of any danger and they led the people in collective worship, including when they were at war: *Only the priests, Aaron's descendants, are allowed to blow the trumpets. This is a permanent law for you, to be observed from generation to generation. When you arrive in your own land and go to war against your enemies who attack you, sound the alarm with the trumpets. Then the LORD your God will remember you and rescue you from your enemies.*<sup>Nu.10:8-9</sup> This "chaplaincy" role of the priests continued under Joshua when they led the army around Jericho for 7 days before the city was captured. *"Take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." And he ordered the army, "Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the LORD."*<sup>Josh.6:6-7</sup> Jehoshaphat organised "chaplains" to go at the head of the army: *Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendour of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever." As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.*<sup>2Chron.20:20-21</sup> King David had his own personal "chaplain": *Ira, a descendant of Jair, was David's personal priest.*<sup>2Sam.20:26</sup>

Cromwell's military success in the C17<sup>th</sup>, was largely due to the discipline of his soldiers and before going into battle they would pray and sing from the Book of Psalms. Cromwell's soldiers were each given a pocket Bible for their own personal use. This *Soldier's Pocket Bible* consisted of 150 war-related verses taken from the *Geneva Bible* and was usually kept in their waistcoat pocket under the soldiers' outer coat. According to Cromwell, his soldiers never lost a battle after the *Soldier's Pocket Bible* was issued to them in 1643. He declared, *"Truly I think he that prays best, rights best. I know nothing that will give like courage and confidence as the knowledge of God in Christ will; and I bless God to see any even in this army able and willing to impart the knowledge they have for the good of others."* At least one of Cromwell's soldiers was saved when a bullet fired at him became lodged in his *Soldiers Pocket Bible*! During the American Civil War, the *American Tract Society* reprinted over 50,000 copies of Cromwell's *Soldier's Pocket Bible* for the Union troops. Over 620,000 men died in this Civil War (which was more than the American military casualties in

WWI and WWII combined) and to attend to the spiritual needs of soldiers on both sides, there were 5,000 itinerant preachers and 3,400 commissioned chaplains. D.L.Moody was a Chaplain in the Union Army and E.M.Bounds (author of the classic *Power through Prayer*) was a Chaplain in the Confederate Army. Over 300,000 soldiers from both sides were converted to Christ during that Civil War!

The Bible verses in *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* were organised under 16 headings, including: *A Soldier must not do wickedly. A Soldier must be valiant for God's cause. A Soldier must Consider and Believe God's precious promises. A Soldier must love his enemies as they are his enemies, and hate them as they are God's enemies. A Soldier must cry unto God in his heart in the very instant of battle. A Soldier must consider that sometimes God's people have the worst in battle as well as God's enemies.* These headings are applicable to all Christians because, although most of us are not soldiers defending our country, we are Christ's soldiers in a spiritual battle and surrounded by spiritual dangers. Christians live in a hostile environment where the world's values and ideas are opposed to God's values and ideas. *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.*<sup>Eph.2:2</sup> That doesn't mean everyone in the world consciously serves the devil, but it does mean that we are distinct and different from the world. *Don't you know that to be a friend of the world is to hate God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*<sup>Jas.4:4</sup> God loves the people of the world and our battle is not with them: *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.*<sup>Jn.3:16</sup> No! Our battle is with the devil's plans and strategies that dominate the people of the world: *Let the Lord make you strong. Depend on his mighty power. Put on all of God's armour. Then you can stand firm against the devil's evil plans. Our fight is not against human beings. It is against the rulers, the authorities and the powers of this dark world. It is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly world. So put on all of God's armour. Evil days will come. But you will be able to stand up to anything. And after you have done everything you can, you will still be standing.*<sup>Eph.6:10-13</sup>

The devil's strategy is to control people's minds, their thoughts and their behaviour so they don't believe God or accept that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son: *Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.*<sup>2Cor.4:4</sup> But God has His own strategy—God's strategy is to mobilise His soldiers to teach His Word from the Bible: *You have heard me teach in front of many witnesses. Pass on to men you can trust the things you've heard me say. Then they will be able to teach others also. Like a good soldier of Christ Jesus, share in the hard times with us.*<sup>2Tim.2:2-3</sup> All Believers are Christ's soldiers and we have a spiritual armour to protect us from the enemy's attacks. This armour includes a **Belt; Breastplate; Shoes; Shield; Helmet**—and our weapon is a very sharp, double bladed **Sword**: *So stand firm. Put the belt of truth around your waist. Put the armour of godliness on your chest. Wear on your feet what will prepare you to tell the good news of peace. Also, pick up the shield of faith. With it you can put out all of the flaming arrows of the evil one. Put on the helmet of salvation. And take the sword of the Holy Spirit. The sword is God's word.*<sup>Eph.6:15-17</sup>

Our **Belt** is the **Reality of Jesus** (truth): *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*<sup>Jn.14:6</sup> It is Jesus Christ, God's Son who surrounds us and holds us all together

Our **Breastplate** is the **Righteousness of Jesus** imputed to us: *Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God... So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.*<sup>Gal.3:6-9</sup>

Our **Shoes** is our **Testimony**: *They overcame him (the accuser) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*<sup>Rev.12:11</sup> *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.*<sup>Phile.1:6</sup>

Our **Shield** is our **Faith**—that simple, uncomplicated trust in God: *This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*<sup>1Jn.5:4-5</sup>

Our **Helmet** is our **Salvation**: *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind [literally “a saved mind”].*<sup>2Tim.1:7</sup> As we learn about our salvation, we are able to withstand the deception of the enemy’s arguments because we see them for what they are—lies: *Of course we are human, but we don't fight like humans. The weapons we use in our fight are not made by humans. Rather, they are powerful weapons from God. With them we destroy people's defences, that is, their arguments and all their intellectual arrogance that oppose the knowledge of God. We take every thought captive so that it is obedient to Christ.*<sup>2Cor.10:3-5</sup>

Our **Sword** is the **Word of God**: *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.*<sup>Heb.4:12-13</sup>

**Believers, Bibles and Battles**—these are all connected. We have been reconciled to God and now have peace: *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace.*<sup>Eph.2:13-14</sup> But the war will not completely end until Jesus returns to destroy the last enemy—death itself! So, as **Believers**, let’s be on our guard and stay alert as we continue to use the **Bible** to keep our spiritual armour effective and our spiritual sword sharp, so we don’t lose another **Battle**: *Therefore, we must not fall asleep like other people, but we must stay awake and be sober. People who sleep, sleep at night; people who get drunk, get drunk at night. Since we belong to the day, we must be sober. We must put on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet... Therefore, encourage each other and strengthen one another as you are doing.*<sup>1Thess.5:6-11</sup>

## **Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Ps.28 Lk.1**

### **What will you celebrate this Christmas?**

Christmas today is more “*Christ—massacred*” than “*Christmas—sacred*” with tradition and commercialism morphing Christmas into a secular pageant. Jesus has been replaced by Father Christmas and the greeting “*Happy Christmas*” is often changed to “*Season’s Greetings*”, or worse “*Happy Wintermas*”! Even our Church traditions have over-sentimentalised Christ’s birth so that there is often little resemblance to the Biblical record of Jesus’ birth. But this secularising of Christmas is not new! The C16<sup>th</sup> reformer Bishop Hugh Latimer (who was burnt at the stake for his faith at Oxford in 1555) said: *Men dishonour Christ more in the 12 days of Christmas than in all the 12 months besides.* In the C17<sup>th</sup> the Puritans were so concerned about the immoral revelling of Christmas that they legislated against the “*Christ—massacred*” of Christmas.\*\* In 1647, Parliament officially outlawed Christmas and in 1652 reaffirmed its ban with this resolution: *That no observation shall be had of the five and twentieth day of December commonly called Christmas-Day; nor any solemnity used or exercised in churches upon the day in respect thereof.* Town criers shouted: “*No Christmas! No Christmas!*” resulting in riots across the country. Canterbury passed a resolution that: *if they could not have Christmas Day, they would have the King back on his throne again.* On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Canterbury town Crier proclaimed that: *Christmas day, and all other Superstitious festivals should be put down, and that a Market should be kept upon Christmas day.* Only a few shops were open before a crowd of over 10,000 people forced them shut and then started the “*Plum Pudding Riot*”. Under the slogan “*For God, King Charles, and Kent*” the crowd descended into violence and the city was under their control for several weeks until they were forced to surrender in early January! Christmas was even banned in Boston Ma. from 1659 to 1681.

The Puritan’s attempt to restore Christ to Christmas failed miserably—which is not surprising because the Christian faith is foolishness to non-Christians (even if they attend Church



services). *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.*<sup>1Cor.2:14</sup> But even though non-Christians think our faith is folly, we should not dismiss them as “lost”, “evil” or “wicked” but think of them as “not-yet-Christians” and remember that they are loved by God<sup>Jn.3:16</sup>. We have a duty to teach people about Christ—in fact we have a Commission from Christ Himself to do this.<sup>Matt.28:18-20</sup> And although not everyone will become a Christian, just a small number of Believers can change the culture of a community by sharing God’s love. *But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world. Those people belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them. But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.*<sup>1Jn.4:4-6</sup> And what better way to start to teach people about Christ than to celebrate His birth?

All celebrations should be happy and enjoyable—and because Jesus was a very joyful person, Christmas celebrations especially, should be happy and enjoyable. *But about the Son he says, “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”*<sup>Heb.1:8-9</sup> We don’t know all the details of Jesus’ birth, so many people use poetic license to elaborate the Christmas story with sheep, donkeys, camels and even snow! However, we should remember that the “Reason for the Season” is the human birth of God’s Son and be careful that sentimentalism does not change the Christmas story from theology into mythology!

Luke wrote his Gospel as a credible record after researching the historical facts of Jesus’ birth and His ministry: *Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account... so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.*<sup>Lk.1:1-4</sup> Jesus didn’t just “arrive” as a baby—God prepared the way for Jesus’ incarnation by setting up the western civilisation to provide exactly the right conditions for His birth, His redemptive death and the fast expansion of the Church. *But when the right time came, God sent his Son into the world. A woman gave birth to him, and he came under the control of God's laws. God sent him to pay for the freedom of those who were controlled by these laws so that we would be adopted as his children.*<sup>Gal.4:4-5</sup> When the time was right for Jesus to be born, God sent an angel to prepare Mary to be His mother: *Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.*<sup>Lk.1:30-33</sup> Understandably, Mary wanted to know how a few more details about her imminent baby and the angel explained: *“The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy child developing inside you will be called the Son of God. Elizabeth, your relative, is six months pregnant with a son in her old age. People said she couldn't have a child. But nothing is impossible for God.”* Mary answered, *“I am the Lord's servant. Let everything you've said happen to me.”*<sup>Lk.1:35-38</sup>

Jesus is God and has always existed. *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.*<sup>Jn.1:1-2</sup> When Jesus became human, He was conceived by a virgin, lived a sinless life, died and rose from the dead with an immortal body and then physically ascended to heaven. In A.D.325 these details were concisely formulated as the **Nicene Creed**: *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. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For*

*our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.*

As we approach Christmas, let's enjoy the Christmas traditions, but keep focused on the real purpose—which is Christ's advent. And Jesus was born so He may die that we may live. As Wesley\*\*\* says in his carol *Hark the herald angels sing: Mild He lays His glory by; Born that man no more may die; Born to raise the sons of earth; Born to give them second birth. **The reason Jesus came to earth was so we could go to heaven!*** Jesus was born to save us from our sins and by His death produce a plentiful harvest of new lives: *Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. She is going to have a son. You must give him the name Jesus. That is because he will save his people from their sins.*<sup>Matt.1:20-21</sup>

Although Jesus' birth was wonderful and a great occasion to celebrate, it was actually a fairly normal event—it was Jesus' conception that was a miracle because it is physically impossible for a mother to conceive a baby without a father. But even greater miracle than Jesus' birth was Jesus' death because through Jesus' death God forgave the sins of the world. *But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.*<sup>1Jn.2:1-2</sup> *Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives... Should I pray, 'Father, save me from this hour'? But this is the very reason I came!*<sup>1Jn.12:23-27</sup> *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*<sup>2Cor.5:21</sup>

God prepared the right place and the right time for Jesus' birth and then organised the right people to share the Good News of Jesus—people like Zechariah and Elizabeth, the Shepherds, the Magi, Simeon and Anna. And God has also prepared the right people to share the Good News of Jesus today—people like you and me. So let's continue to do this as we **celebrate Jesus' birth this Christmas.**

**\*\***During the Puritans' rule in England, many tracts both for and against the celebration of Christmas were published. In 1656, Hezekiah Woodward wrote an anti-Christmas tract entitled Christmas Day:

"The old Heathen's Feasting Day, in honour of Saturn their Idol-God, the Papist's Massing Day, the Profane Man's Ranting Day, the Superstitious Man's Idol Day, the Multitude's Idle Day, Satan's—that Adversary's—Working Day, the True Christian Man's Fasting day. We are persuaded, no one thing more hindereth the Gospel work all the year-long, than doth the observation of that Idol Day once in a year, having so many days of cursed observation with it."

**\*\*\***Wesley actually wrote: *Hark how all the Welkin rings* but Whitfield changed it to: *Hark the herald angels sing.* Wesley's original hymn also included these verses:

*Come, Desire of Nations, come, Fix in Us thy humble Home,  
Rise, the Woman's Conqu'ring Seed, Bruise in Us the Serpent's Head.  
Now display thy saving Pow'r, Ruin'd Nature now restore,  
Now in Mystic Union join Thine to Ours, and Ours to Thine.*

*Adam's Likeness, LORD, efface, Stamp thy Image in its Place,  
Second Adam from above, Reinstate us in thy Love.  
Let us Thee, tho' lost, regain, Thee, the Life, the Inner Man:  
O! to All Thyself impart, Form'd in each Believing Heart.*

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Ps.29. Lk.2.**

## **Folklore, Faith and Father Christmas!**

Last week we asked the question: “*What will you celebrate this Christmas?*” We saw that Christmas today is more “*Christ—massacred*” than “*Christmas—sacred*” with tradition and commercialism morphing Christmas into a secular pageant. The Puritans tried to restore the “*sacred*” to Christ instead of the “*massacred*” but they forgot that the angel’s message was: *Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*<sup>Lk.2:10</sup> When the Jews were saved from death they celebrated with great joy and by the giving and receiving of presents: *Mordecai told the Jews to celebrate the time when they got rest from their enemies. That was the month when their sadness was turned into joy. It was when their sobbing turned into a day for celebrating. He wrote the letters to celebrate those days as times of joy. He wanted the people to enjoy good food. He told them to give presents of food to one another. He also wanted them to give gifts to those who were poor.*<sup>Esth.9:22</sup> We too should celebrate our salvation from spiritual death with great joy and by the giving and receiving of presents. And we can joyfully celebrate Christ’s birth without degrading our celebrations with drunkenness or debauchery. Indeed, Jesus explained that we must celebrate our salvation: *but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*<sup>Lk.10:20</sup> *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*<sup>Lk.15:10</sup> *He heard music and dancing in the house... “We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!”*<sup>Lk.15:25-32</sup>

We also saw that our Christmas traditions have been affected by mythology. Although traditions can be fun, much is also fiction, so it is important that we a distinction between faith and folklore in our festivities. The popular Christmas is dominated by Santa Claus—with the world exchanging Father God with Father Christmas and replacing faith with folklore and wishful thinking—such as “*if you believe hard enough, it will come true*”! However, most folklore traditions are based on real historical events—and Father Christmas is no exception. The origin of *Father Christmas* or *Santa Claus* can be traced back to the 4<sup>th</sup> to a man call Nicholas. He was the son of wealthy parents who lived in Lycia, Turkey and when his parents died, Nicholas distributed his inheritance to the needy and accepted the call to full-time Christian service but was imprisoned for his faith. After the Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian, Nicholas was released from prison and whilst still in his twenties, he became overseer (Bishop) of the Churches of Myra. Nicholas vigorously defended the Trinitarian teaching at the Council of Nicene and was disciplined for actually slapping Arius in the face during the debate (Arius taught that Jesus was not eternally God but was created at some point in time and so Jesus was subordinate to the Father). The Council formulated the Nicene Creed, which stated: **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. Through him all things were made...** Legend has it that a poor father in Myra had 3 daughters but no money to pay for their dowry and Nicholas secretly put some gold coins in their stockings which were hanging over the fireplace to dry. The tradition of St Nicholas permeated most of Europe but in many different forms—some with presents and some with punishment for children who were naughty and couldn’t recite their prayers from memory.

Also connected with Christmas, and probably influencing the tradition of Father Christmas, is “*Good King Wenceslas*”. Wenceslas was from Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), who at the age of fifteen, became Duke of Bohemia when his father died in A.D.921. As a devout Believer, Wenceslas felt his calling was to reflect God in all that he did. Rather than reflecting the general spirit of the Dark Ages, the young ruler’s nation was built on trust, faith, and mercy. Wanting to inspire those he ruled, he sought out the poor and meek and shared the bounty of his kingdom with them. It became a tradition that on each Christmas Eve, Wenceslas and his pages



left the warm castle and tramped through deep snow to distribute food and clothing to the poor. In spite of his kindness, Wenceslas was murdered by his twin brother at a church service in A.D.935. The Duke's final words reflected his short life's work. "*May God forgive you.*" The Holy Roman Emperor Otto I posthumously conferred on him the "*regal dignity and title*" which is why in the Carol, he is "*good king Wenceslas*". A preacher from C12<sup>th</sup> said of Wenceslas: *But his deeds I think you know better than I could tell you; for, as is read in his Passion, no one doubts that, rising every night from his noble bed, with only one chamberlain, he went around to God's churches and gave alms generously to widows, orphans, those in prison and afflicted by every difficulty, so much so that he was considered, not a prince, but the father of all the wretched.*

But the Father Christmas we know today, originated in America. America was founded by the Puritans who had rejected the veneration of saints in the established European denominations. But with more and more migrants coming to America, the European traditions gradually transferred. In 1773 some newspapers mentioned St. A Claus and spoke of his impact in the homes of some immigrants. The Dutch name for St. Nicholas, is *Sinterklaas*, which soon became *Santa Claus*. Clement Moore established the tradition of Santa Claus with his poem, *The Night Before Christmas* which he recited to his children on Christmas Eve 1822: *'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse; The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there... He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf, And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself; A wink of his eye and a twist of his head, Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread; He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work, And fill 'd all the stockings; then turned with a jerk, And laying his finger aside of his nose, And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose; He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle, And away they all flew like the down of a thistle. But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight. "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night.* The department stores used the idea of Moore's *Santa Claus* but it was not until 1863 that the modern image of Santa Claus was standardised. Thomas Nast, (the famed illustrator who created the donkey and elephant images of the Democratic and Republican parties) was asked to illustrate Moore's "*The Night Before Christmas*" for a book of children's poems. This was during the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln recruited Nast to draw Santa Claus visiting with Federal troops around a battlefield campfire on Christmas Eve. It is said that Nast's drawing had a dynamic effect on morale in the North during that long, cold, and tragic winter. Santa received several makeovers and his final one was in 1931 for a Coca-Cola advert when Santa became the portly, grandfatherly cheery person we know today.

In the 200 years since the first publication of Moore's "*The Night Before Christmas*," Santa got another reindeer, Rudolph, who has appeared in countless other books, movies, and television programs, and who has grown into an icon that means as much to the image of Christmas as the tree, stockings, and gifts. Yet what so many have forgotten is that while the appearance of Santa Claus was invented by men, Santa's heart and spirit were inspired by the love and generosity of Christians such as **Nicholas** and **Wenceslas** who felt called by God to reach out to the needy around them.

Folklore, Faith and Father Christmas may all start with the same letter, but our **faith** in the Christ of Christmas brings far greater joy than the Father Christmas of folklore can ever do. In the real Christmas an angel announced to the Shepherds: *Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, a message that will fill everyone with joy. Today your Saviour, Christ the Lord, was born in David's city. This is how you will recognize him: You will find an infant wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.*<sup>Lk.2:10-12</sup> Let's honour the angel's message and be filled with joy at this Christmas because we know its true meaning—we have a Saviour who has saved us from our sins. If the Jews of Esther's day were instructed: *to celebrate those days as times of joy, to enjoy good food, to give presents of food to one another*



*and to give gifts to those who were poor,*<sup>Esth.9:22</sup> then let us celebrate Christ's birth *as times of joy, enjoy good food, give presents of food to one another and give gifts to those who are poor.*

## **Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2018. Ps.24 Matt.2**

### **Folklore, Faith, Fir Trees and Festive lights!**

Practically every home that celebrates Christmas will have a Christmas fir tree illuminated with festive lights. Initially this seems to have no connection with the Nativity story and many people see it a legacy from pagan folklore or a tradition promoted by commerce. There are some Christians who think that if the Bible does not specifically permit something, then we cannot do it—and there are other Christians who think that if the Bible does not specifically prohibit something, then we can do it. However, Christianity is not following a set of rules but following the Holy Spirit's leading, within the parameters of God's Kingdom values—*i.e.*, New Covenant teaching. *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*<sup>Gal.5:18</sup> So, we don't need to treat all folklore and traditions as pagan or unholy and even though some of our Christmas traditions may not have any Biblical basis, we can still enjoy them—so long as we make a distinction between faith and fantasy, and don't degrade our celebrations with drunkenness or debauchery. Fir trees and the Christian faith have been linked as far back as the 7<sup>th</sup> century when Boniface left his home in Crediton, Devon and went to Europe as a missionary, establishing hundreds of churches across France and Germany. Legend has it that he came upon a crowd who were about to kill a young boy as a sacrifice. Boniface told them it was wrong and tried to stop them, but they ignored him, so he hit the great oak tree the boy was tied to. The oak tree fell over and a small fir tree became visible near where the oak had stood. Boniface pointed the tree out to the people, explaining that the evergreen stood for the Tree of Life and represented the eternal life found in Christ. Pointing to the triangular shape of the tree, Boniface explained that the 3 points represented the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Boniface's simple message of the gospel so impacted them that they were convicted of their sins and straightaway committed their lives to Christ. Five centuries later this story had become a legend and each winter throughout France and Germany, evergreen trees were hung from ceilings as a symbol of Christianity. During the Dark Ages, in the Baltic region of Europe, evergreen trees were cut and placed outside churches during December. These were referred to as "*paradise trees*" and used to explain the story of Adam and Eve to children. Apples were hung on the trees, representing the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Children playing the parts of Adam and Eve would listen to another child portraying the serpent and then proceed to eat the apple. When they took a bite, they were chased from church property into the cold world.

But probably the first fir tree that was actually called a Christmas Tree was in 1510 in Riga, Latvia (although Estonia has a rival claim). However, it was Martin Luther who is credited with the Christmas Tree as we know it today. Walking home one winter evening, Luther was awed by the brilliance of stars twinkling amidst evergreens. To recapture the scene for his family, he cut a tree, brought it indoors and wired its branches with lighted candles. And this decorated Christmas tree soon became a German tradition that eventually spread throughout Christendom.

Although England had the tradition of decorating churches and homes with evergreens at Christmas, the decorating a fir tree as a Christmas tree started with Queen Charlotte—George III's German-born wife. In 1800, she introduced a Christmas tree at a party she gave for children but initially the custom was mostly kept by just the royal family. On Christmas Eve 1832, when Princess Victoria was 13, she wrote in her journal: *After dinner... we then went into the drawing-room near the dining-room... There were two large round tables on which were placed two trees hung with lights and sugar ornaments. All the presents being placed round the trees.* After Victoria's marriage in

1840 to her German cousin Prince Albert, the custom became more widespread and by 1844 there was an illustrated book called *The Christmas Tree*, which described in detail, the use and origins of Christmas trees. Decorated Christmas trees soon became popular at public entertainments, charity bazaars and in hospitals and in 1906 a charity was set up specifically to ensure even poor children in London slums 'who had never seen a Christmas tree' would enjoy one that year. Anti-German sentiment after World War I briefly reduced their popularity but the effect was short-lived and by the mid-1920s most people had a Christmas tree with decorations in their home. In 2013 the number of trees grown in Britain for the Christmas market was approximately 8 million and their display in homes, shops and public spaces is now a normal part of the Christmas season. The large Christmas tree on display in Trafalgar Square, London each December is donated by the city of Oslo as a token of their appreciation for our support of the Norwegian resistance during the Second World War. Norway also annually gifts a Christmas tree to Washington, D.C. as a symbol of friendship between Norway and the US and as an expression of gratitude from Norway for the help received from the US during World War II. (Norway was occupied by the Germans during WW2. Vidkun Quisling was Prime Minister in a joint German/Norwegian pro-Nazi puppet government, known as the Quisling regime. After the war Quisling was executed by firing-squad for embezzlement, murder and high treason against the Norwegian state. The word "quisling" is now a byword for "collaborator" or "traitor".)

The star that decorates the top of most Christmas trees is a visual reminder that the star and sceptre (ruler) that Balaam prophesied about is fulfilled in Jesus: *I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel.*<sup>Nu.24:17</sup> And that star also led the wise men to meet with the King of kings and worship Him—even though He was a baby! Matthew's account of their visit is a wonderful description of true worship. Our word "worship" comes from the old English word "weorscipe" meaning "worth-ship". **So, to worship Jesus means to express our evaluation of Jesus—what we believe He is worth.** Worship is **giving of ourselves to God** so we should worship God passionately and exuberantly by giving ourselves to Him generously, cheerfully and willingly. **Like the wise men we worship Jesus by:**

**Being filled with joy** (not fear or panic or unbelief; there is joy in God's presence)

**Coming to Jesus** (Jesus is the focus of our worship and we cannot worship God from a distance)

**Bowing down and worshipping Him** (humility and adoration must be the attitude of our heart)

**Opening our treasures** (our heart is where our treasure is; <sup>Matt.6:21</sup> worship requires an open heart)

**Presenting Him gifts** (worship is giving to God from our treasure, i.e. our heart)

*All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"*<sup>Rev.7:11-12</sup>

The earth and everything in it, belongs to God—including fir trees and festive lights. We can enjoy the festivities of Christmas so long as we have (spiritually) clean hands, a pure heart and don't worship idols (especially the idols of festivities, commerce and hedonism). *The earth belongs to the LORD. And so does everything in it. The world belongs to him. And so do all those who live in it... Who may stand in his holy place? Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies. They will receive the LORD's blessing and have a right relationship with God their Saviour.*<sup>Ps.24:1-</sup>

As we see Christmas fir trees with their festive lights, let's use them as a visual aid to retell the Christmas message.

Like **Boniface** let's explain when our old life dies, **there is new life to be found in Christ**—the tree of life that is “*evergreen*”. And this new life involves the Trinity—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Like **Luther**, let's **see the glory and majesty of God** in the festive lights on the Christmas fir trees and bring God's glory into our homes.

Like the **Wise men** who followed the star to Jesus, let's follow their example and open our treasure (our heart) and **give Jesus precious gifts** of worship and adoration.

And as we enjoy the Christmas fir trees and festive lights, remember that Jesus said: “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*”<sup>Jn.8:12</sup>

**Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year.**

Great God, in public and private, in church and at home, may my life be steeped in prayer and filled with the spirit of grace and supplication as each prayer is perfumed with the incense of atoning blood. Help me and defend me, until from praying ground I pass to the realm of unceasing praise. Urged by my need, invited by Your promises and called by Your Spirit, I enter Your presence, worshipping You with godly fear, awed by Your majesty, greatness, glory, but encouraged by Your love.

I bring Jesus to You in the arms of faith, pleading His righteousness to offset my iniquities, rejoicing that He will weigh down the scales for me and satisfy Your justice. I bless You that great sin draws out great grace and that, although the least sin deserves infinite punishment because it is done against an infinite God, yet there is mercy for me—for where guilt is most terrible, there Your mercy in Christ is most free and deep. Bless me by revealing to me more of Your saving merits, by causing Your goodness to pass before me and by speaking peace to my contrite heart. Strengthen me to give You no rest until Christ shall reign supreme within me, in every thought, word and deed, in a faith that purifies the heart, overcomes the world, works by love, fastens me to You and ever clings to the cross.

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> December 2018 Ps.34:1-11**

**What was your favourite day of 2018?**

We have had some glad days, some sad days and lots of in-between days this year. As approach the new year, it is good to reflect on the past year and remember God's faithfulness. “*Auld lang syne*” is often sung at the close of the old year and the beginning of the new year. In 1788, Robert Burns composed this poem based on an unwritten Scottish traditional song and, even though it uses some quaint phrases, it is sung in practically every English-speaking country. The phrase *Auld lang syne* in English is *old long since*, meaning *for old time's sake* or *days gone by*, so let's reflect on the last 365 days gone by. We started the year with this prayer: **Lord, may our walk with You this year remain simple, strong, and sound, then we will finish the year bigger, better and more blessed than when we started—and full of faith and the Holy Spirit! In Jesus Name. Amen.** Our Memory Verses had the theme: **Our God is a place of safety in times of trouble.** We learnt Nahum 1:7 (**The LORD is good. When people are in trouble, they can go to Him for safety. He takes good care of those who trust in Him.**) and tried hard to learn 11 verses of Psalm 34. In our Sunday Services we read and preached though all of Mark's Gospel, the first 8 chapters of Acts and also looked at the life of Joshua. When we had a guest speaker, I printed some notes that would be helpful—as Peter did when he wrote his letter: *I have tried to stimulate your wholesome thinking and refresh your memory. I want you to remember what the holy prophets said long ago and what our Lord and Saviour commanded through your apostles.*<sup>2Pet.3:1-2</sup> One of these helpful notes included: “**Big moments matter, but small moments are formative.** Most of us have

big moments that were spiritually life-changing. Perhaps it was a message at a Christian conference or sermon at camp. Or maybe it was a particular sermon our pastor preached. But our spiritual lives are formed by a lifetime of small moments. **We grow by a series of weekly, mostly forgettable church services—not from one big epic church service.** We learn the Word, not from one class or one sermon, but from years of classes and sermons. The prophet Isaiah reminds us that the Word grows in us, *line after line, a little here, a little there.*<sup>Is.28:10</sup> As I think about my own life, I can point to two or three ‘light bulb’ moments, but mostly I’m grateful for the spiritual rhythms of going to church, singing the hymns, prayer, and fellowship. Those disciplines built into my heart’s spiritual muscles are exercised in times of temptation or trial.” Yes, the end of the year can be a useful time for reflection, but the new year did not always start in January! Until 1752 our year began on Lady Day—25<sup>th</sup> March (*i.e.* in 1750, 24<sup>th</sup> March was 1750 and the next day was 25<sup>th</sup> March 1751). In the old Roman Calendar, March was the first month of the year (hence Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. were, as their names suggest, the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> month). In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII changed the lunar *Julian Calendar* to a solar calendar (now called the *Gregorian Calendar*), but as England had broken away from the Roman Catholic Church, we stayed with the old calendar for another 190 years. The lunar calendar lagged behind the solar calendar and so after we changed calendars, extra days had to be added. In 1753 people went to bed on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September and woke up on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September! The Treasury kept to the Julian calendar which is why our Tax year starts on April 6<sup>th</sup> (they added 11 days on to 25<sup>th</sup> March and a further day in 1800).

But our calendars are merely a human convenience to enable us to plan ahead and synchronise our activities. Because the solar system is so perfectly tuned, we can quite literally, set our watch by it. We have seasons that rotate so precisely each year—just as God created them—that we can regulate our life, record history and predict future season by the solar and lunar systems. *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.*<sup>Heb.11:3</sup> *God said, “Let there be lights in the huge space of the sky. Let them separate the day from the night. Let them serve as signs to mark off the seasons and the days and the years. Let them serve as lights in the huge space of the sky to give light on the earth.” And that's exactly what happened.*<sup>Gen.1:14-15</sup> *As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.*<sup>Gen.8:22</sup>

Not only has God created seasons but He has a calendar and in God’s calendar there are now only 2 important dates: “**today**” and “**that day**”. **Today** is day of God’s grace and everyone should know about the time and date because at some time it will end. **That Day** is Judgement Day when we will all stand before Almighty God to give an account of our lives—how we have lived and what we have done with our talents—and no one but God knows when that day will come: *The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know.*<sup>Acts.1:7</sup> *Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*<sup>1Thes.5:1-3</sup> We will all be judged for what we have done and how we have lived: *Your mouths say everything that is in your hearts. A good man says good things. These come from the good that is put away inside him. An evil man says evil things. These come from the evil that is put away inside him. But here is what I tell you. On judgment day, people will have to account for every careless word they have spoken. By your words you will be found guilty or not guilty.*<sup>Matt.12:34-37</sup> However, the criteria for eternal life is not what we have done but whether our names are written in the **Book of Life**. *I saw a great white throne and the One who was sitting on it. When the earth and sky saw his face, they ran away. There was no place for them. I saw the dead, great and small, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened. Then another book was opened. It was the Book of Life. The dead were judged by what they had done. The things they had done were written in the books. The sea*



*gave up the dead that were in it. And Death and Hell gave up their dead. Each of the dead was judged by what he had done. Then Death and Hell were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.*<sup>Rev.20:11-15</sup>

But until **that day** comes, we are living in that other date, **Today**—and **Today** is **the day of God's grace**. Like Pooh, today is my favourite day: *What day is it?* asked Pooh. *It's today,* squeaked Piglet. *My favourite day,* said Pooh. God's **Today** began with Jesus becoming human: *Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*<sup>Lk.2:11</sup> *You are my Son; today I have become your Father.*<sup>Heb.1:5</sup> This **Today** is the day of salvation when everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved: *"The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart." And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be ashamed." ...for "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."*<sup>Rom.10:8-13</sup> But we have a duty to live for God and by His standards—or we will be no different from the Israelites in Moses' time: *Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. Remember what it says: "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled."*<sup>Heb.3:12-15</sup> But **Today** will end—and God always keeps His appointments on His calendar: *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*<sup>2Pet.3:8-9</sup>

So, as we enter another year of God's grace let's be wise, making **today** our favourite day: *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*<sup>1Pet.4:1-5</sup> Then when we come to **that day**, we will hear God say to us: *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*<sup>Matt.25:21</sup>

**Order this day, all my communications according to Your wisdom and to the gain of mutual good. May I speak each word as if my last word and walk each step as my final one. If my life should end **today**, let this be my best day!**

*Deut.31:19-22*

## Bible Time Chart

### Time Chart of OT

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

### Time Chart of NT

20/19B.C.	<i>Herod's Temple began</i>
18/17B.C.	<i>Herod's Temple in use</i>
c8B.C.	Zechariah in the Temple (Lk.1)
5B.C. April 5 <sup>th</sup>	Birth of Jesus
4B.C.	<i>Death of Herod the Great</i>
A.D.14 -37	<i>Reign of Tiberius Caesar</i>
A.D.29	Baptism of Jesus ( <i>Lk.3:1 – 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius reign hence A.D. 29</i> )**
A.D.33 April Wed. 1 <sup>st</sup>	Last Supper (see Colin Humphreys' " <i>The Mystery of the Last Supper</i> ")
A.D.33 April Fri. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Crucifixion of Jesus
c A.D.35	Conversion of Paul <i>Acts 9</i>
<A.D.37	<i>Christianity came to Britain. ***</i>
A.D.37-41	<i>Reign of Caligula</i>
A.D.41-54	<i>Reign of Claudius</i>
c A.D.44	<i>Death of Herod Agrippa 1</i>
< A.D.50	<b>Letter of James</b>
A.D.48-49	Paul's 1 <sup>st</sup> missionary journey
A.D.49/50	Jerusalem Conference <i>Acts.15</i>
A.D.50	Paul's 2 <sup>nd</sup> missionary journey
A.D.50-52	Paul at Corinth
A.D.51	<b>1 &amp; 2 Thessalonians</b> from Corinth
A.D.52	<b>Galatians</b> from Corinth
A.D.54	Paul's 3 <sup>rd</sup> missionary journey
A.D.54 -68	<i>Reign of Nero</i>
A.D.54-57	Paul at Ephesus
A.D.57	<b>1Corinthians</b> from Ephesus
A.D.57	<b>2Corinthians</b> from Macedonia
A.D.57/58	<b>Romans</b> from Corinth
A.D.58	Paul's arrest at Jerusalem
A.D.58-60	Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea
A.D.60-61	Paul winters at Malta
A.D.61	Paul arrives at Rome
A.D.61-63	Paul's imprisonment at Rome
A.D.62	<b>Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon</b> from Rome
A.D.63	<b>Philippians</b> from Rome
A.D.63-65	Paul's release & further ministry
A.D.63	<b>1Timothy &amp; Titus</b>
A.D.64	<b>Hebrews</b>
A.D.64	<i>Herod's Temple finished</i>

<A.D.65	<b>Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts</b>
<A.D.65	<b>Revelation****</b>
A.D.64-68	<b>1 &amp; 2 Peter</b> from Rome
A.D.65	Peter's death in Rome
A.D.66	Paul's 2 <sup>nd</sup> imprisonment at Rome
A.D.66	<b>2 Timothy</b> from Rome
A.D.66/67	Paul's death at Rome
A.D.67/68	<b>Jude</b>
<i>A.D.68</i>	<i>Death of Nero</i>
<i>A.D.68-69</i>	<i>Reign of Galba</i>
<i>A.D.69</i>	<i>Reign of Otho</i>
<i>A.D.69</i>	<i>Reign of Vitellius</i>
<i>A.D.69-79</i>	<i>Reign of Vespasian</i>
<i>A.D.70</i>	<i>Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus</i>
<i>A.D.79-81</i>	<i>Reign of Titus</i>
<A.D.98	<b>Gospel John, 1, 2, &amp; 3 John</b>
A.D.98/100	Death of John
<i>A.D.81-96</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 455B.C. (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 A.D.29 (*there is no date of 0B.C. or A.D.0*).

\*\*\* 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:

##### External evidence:

Clement of Alexandria (A.D.150-220) plainly states that it was Nero who banished John to Patmos, not Emperor Domitian: *And to give you confidence, when you have thus truly repented, that there remains for you a trustworthy hope of salvation, hear a story that is no mere story, but a true account of John the apostle that has been handed down and preserved in memory. When after the death of the tyrant (previously identified as Nero) he removed from the island of Patmos to Ephesus, he used to journey by request to the neighbouring districts of the Gentiles, in some places to appoint bishops, in others to regulate whole churches, in others to set among the clergy some one man, it may be, of those indicated by the Spirit.* (“Who is the Rich Man that shall be Saved?”, Section 42)

Cerinthus was a C1<sup>st</sup> author who wrote *The Pseudo-Apocalypse*. He died well before John, i.e. well before A.D.95, but his Pseudo-Apocalypse contains many references to John's Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation).

##### Internal evidence:

**42 months** = the period between A.D.64 and A.D.66 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 (Rev.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*.

Rome launched its persecution against Christians in A.D.64 under the direction of Caesar Nero. This ended with his death in A.D.68. It had lasted around 1240 days (3½ years). Rome launched its attack against Jerusalem in A.D.66 and this ended when Jerusalem fell under the leadership of Caesar Vespasian in A.D.70. This was a period of 1260 days (3½ years).



## Memory Verses 2018 God is our Place of Safety in times of trouble

**January:** The LORD is good. When people are in trouble, they can go to Him for safety. He takes good care of those who trust in Him. Nahum 1:7

**February:** I will thank the LORD at all times. My lips will always praise Him. Ps.34:1

**March:** I will honour the LORD. Let those who are hurting hear and be joyful. Ps.34:2

**April:** Join me in giving glory to the LORD. Let us honour Him together. Ps.34:3

**May:** I looked to the LORD, and He answered me. He saved me from everything I was afraid of. Ps.34:4

**June:** Those who look to Him beam with joy. They are never put to shame. Ps.34:5

**July:** This poor man called out, and the LORD heard him. He saved him out of all of his troubles. Ps.34:6

**August:** The angel of the LORD stands guard around those who have respect for Him. And He saves them. Ps.34:7

**September:** Taste and see that the LORD is good. Blessed is the man who goes to Him for safety. Ps.34:8

**October:** You people of God, have respect for the LORD. Those who respect Him have everything they need. Ps.34:9

**November:** The lions may grow weak and hungry. But those who look to the LORD have every good thing they need. Ps.34:10

**December:** My children, come. Listen to me. I will teach you to have respect for the LORD. Ps.34:11



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