

Deal Pentecostal Church Sermon Outlines 2013

69 Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. CT14 9EW www.dealpentecostal.co.uk

Paul S Fermor

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Memory Verses

As we start this New Year I would like to thank you again for all your support and fellowship in the past. Looking forward to the future, we are so privileged because we know the *only true God and His Son Jesus Christ, which is Eternal Life.*^{Jn.17:3}

Good sound Theology (the study of God) will enable us to live a blessed, contented and peaceful life, regardless of our circumstances. In every situation we will be able to defend our minds and souls from attacks of doubt, distress, discouragement, despondency and even depression as we use the *shield of faith to extinguish every attack.*^{Eph.6:15} And so this year our Memory Verses are on the theme of God – Who He is. As we remember, recite and recollect these Scripture verses each month it is important to realise that this is not a technique to get what we want in life. But rather this is a means of building the truths of God's Word into our life and consciousness in total dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Church is not just about “theology” but it is about interacting with God and each other – we call it FELLOWSHIP! Please take advantage of opportunities that arise to bless one another with encouraging conversations as well as being with each other. The children in our congregation are an integral part of our Church and they especially need our encouragement and support.

“I want you to know that we 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.”

Remember

God wants us to prosper and enjoy good health, even as our soul prospers.

**We belong to the family of Believers, so wherever we are,
let us continue to think, act, talk, sing and give as Believers!**

We are too blessed to be stressed!

January

God the Father: *Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.* ^{1Cor.8:6}

Sunday 6th January 2013 Ps.91 2Cor.9

Fellowship is for the Faithful

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ^{2Cor.13:14} *(May the grace shown by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love that God has given us, and the sharing of life brought about by the Holy Spirit be with you all.* ^{NIV})

The foundation of Christian faith is **Fellowship** with God that overflows into fellowship with other Believers. In Ancient Greek, the term *fellowship* could apply to marriage, a business partnership, a relationship in society or between friends, or to a spiritual relationship with God. The Greek word for **Fellowship** is *koinōnos* and means a *sharing*, a *participation* and a *partnering*. – see the following uses of the word in the NT: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship (they shared life together* ^{NIV}*), to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* ^{Acts2:42} *James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.* ^{Lk.5:10} *I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now;* ^{Phil.1:3-5} *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?* ^{1Cor.10:16}

Fellowship is Partnership – giving and receiving: No relationship can succeed unless it is 2-way – both giving and receiving – and this especially true of Christian Fellowship. Paul commended the church at Philippi for just that: *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.* ^{Phil.4:14-18} Paul wrote to the Church in Rome: *I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.* ^{Rom.1:11-12}

God has given us everything we need: *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.* ^{2Pet.1:3-4}

But we are to also give back to God a proportion of what He has given us: *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.* ^{1Cor.16:2}

God owns everything and enables us work: *But remember the LORD your God. He gives you the ability to produce wealth. That shows he stands by the terms of his covenant. He promised it with an oath to your people long ago. And he's still faithful to his covenant today.* ^{Deut.8:18} *LORD, you give us peace. You are the one who has done everything we've accomplished.* ^{Is.26:12}

God has called us to be Stewards of His creation – to use it but not abuse it:

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.” ^{Gen.1:28} (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.TM and be its master.^{NCV} Fill the earth and govern it.^{NLT}) *The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel. Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.* ^{Prov.12:10}

As Stewards, God expects us to be faithful: *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful (Believing).* ^{1Cor.4:2}

God always gives us enough to share – He gives bread to eat and seed to sow: *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.”* ^{Gen.1:29} *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.* ^{2Cor.9:10}

Harvest (the reaping of what we sow) is guaranteed by God: *As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.* ^{Gen.8:22} *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* ^{Gal.6:9}

Sowing can be hard work and frustrating as we wait for the harvest: *Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.* ^{Ps.126:5-6}

But in the NT Kingdom of God the sower and reaper work together and are glad together: *I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.* ^{Jn.4:36}

We are to sow to the heavens i.e. look to God for reward rather than the person we have helped: *“In that day I will respond,” declares the LORD—“I will respond to the skies and they will respond to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the olive oil and they will respond to Jezreel (God plants). I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”* ^{Hos.2:21} *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”* ^{Mal.3:10}

Money is an expression of the effort and energy that we have exerted in life. So to think of giving only in terms of money is to sell ourselves short. Sowing is about sharing everything that we have received from God.

Jesus taught that the seed we sow is God’s Word: *This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.* ^{Lk.8:11}

By giving (sowing) we are fellowshiping with God and other Believers. Giving has great rewards – it is Godlike, it is a blessing, and produces a harvest: *Remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’* ^{Acts 20:35} *The blessing of the LORD makes a person rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.* ^{Prov.10:22NLT} *Give freely and become more wealthy; be stingy and lose everything. The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.* ^{Prov.11:24-25 NLT}

Let’s make sure we keep faithful and start this New Year confident that our relationship with God is on a good, sound basis so when we face difficulties, we will say that

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.*

I am sure that the One who began a good work in you will carry it on until it is completed. That will be on the day Christ Jesus returns.^{Phil.1:6} It is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.^{Heb.6:18-19} But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.^{Heb.3:6}

Sunday January 13th 2013 Ps.138 Acts 13

Will you serve God in our Generation?

Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.^{Acts13:36}

The greatest accolade we can ever receive is that we served God's purpose in our generation – that we completed the work God set out for us.

Today's business management seems to be totally focused on efficiency – more for less; but God wants us to be effective, not necessarily efficient. God has always astounded people by over-ruling the “natural laws” that He put into place. We call this a “**MIRACLE**” but actually it is only God being God! Elisha was used by God to show God's “**MIRACLE**” power many times including healing the sick,^{2Kg.5:14} raising the dead^{2Kg.4:32-36} and pouring a little oil into lots of pots!^{2Kg.4:1-7} God has the whole of creation at His disposal and can create anything out of nothing – including time – so He is not concerned about being efficient. What God is really interested in is something which cannot be valued - our life (that is, our eternal spirit: *No man can pay for the life of anyone else. No one can give God what that would cost. The price for a life is very high. No payment is ever enough.*^{Ps.49:7-8} We, who can truly call God “our Father”, have all His resources available to us – in fact: *the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you. So the God who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your bodies, which are going to die. He will do this by the power of his Spirit, who lives in you.*^{Rom.8:11}

So how can we serve God's purpose in our own generation? To serve God's purpose in our life means that we do what He wants us to do. The greatest call on our life is to

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind.’ (This is the first and most important commandment).^{Matt.22:37} The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1674) states that *man's chief end in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.* Nothing else is as important as loving God but this love is not just emotion –

it is a commitment to believe God and to love, honour and obey Him at all times and in every situation. Believing God means that we trust Him and entrust ourselves to Him which then gives us contentment and peace:

for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.^{Phil.4:11-13} Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.^{1Tim.6:6-8NLT}

At the end of Paul's life he was able to state: *I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is a crown waiting for me. It is given to those who are right with God. The Lord, who judges fairly, will give it to me on the day he returns. He will*

not give it only to me. He will also give it to all those who are longing for him to return.^{2Tim.4:7-8} **But this trust (our faith) is not private but public – faith speaks:** It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.”^(Ps.116:10) Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.^{2Cor.4:13-14} **Faith has lips as well as legs!**

God’s will for Jesus (and us) is not just to think nice thoughts about Him or even to say good things about Him but to actually do something – to live out God’s will in our own life: *So when Christ came into the world, he said, “You didn’t want sacrifices and offerings. Instead, you prepared a body for me...Then I said, ‘Here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. God, I have come to do what you want.’”*^{Jeb.10:5-7} We must obey God and actually do what He says: *Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*^{Matt.7:21}

Jesus said that His food was *to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*^{Jn.4:34} He made God’s will His prayer *Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done*^{Lk.22:42} and taught us to pray the same: *Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*^{Matt.6:10} God’s will is for all to be saved: *He doesn’t want anyone to be destroyed. Instead, he wants all people to turn away from their sins*^{2Pet.3:9} so it is important that we communicate God’s Gospel. Although communication is about connecting (not conflicting) with people, if we are a friend of the world then we are an enemy of God: *Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?*^{2as.4:4-5ESV} God loves people,^{Jn.3:16} so obviously God wants us to connect with people and especially the “not-yet-Christians” but Believers should live as a Believers not like the unbelievers of this world: *I wrote a letter to you to tell you to stay away from people who commit sexual sins. I didn’t mean the people of this world who sin that way or who always want more and more. I didn’t mean those who cheat or who worship statues of gods. In that case you would have to leave this world! But here is what I am writing to you. You must stay away from anyone who claims to be a believer but who does those things. Stay away from anyone who commits sexual sins or who always wants more and more things.*^{1Cor.5:9-11} The systems and values of this world are opposed to God and we should be different from them: *Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.*^{Jn.2:15-17NLT} Does the world hate you? Remember that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you like one of its own. But you do not belong to the world. I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.^{Jn.15:18-19}

We must be able to “connect” with others to be able to communicate God’s Good News, but we don’t have to be the same – in fact we will make a bigger impact if we can show that we are different yet have all the benefits of God’s Kingdom: *Righteousness Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit.*^{Rom.14:17} **We need to be spiritually relevant rather than culturally relevant because unless people encounter God they will perish.** However we can be distinct and even different without being weird or a discredit to God and our testimony! If we are clear and clean in our testimony we will honour God and people will have no excuse at the Judgement Day: *Here are some examples. Certain objects make sounds. Take a flute or a harp. No one will know what the tune is unless different notes*

are played. Also, if the trumpet call isn't clear, who will get ready for battle? It's the same with you. You must speak words that people understand. If you don't, no one will know what you are saying. You will just be speaking into the air.^{1Cor.14:7-9}^{T.M.}

As we fellowship with God (share life together) we have the confidence to affirm that God will fulfil His purpose for us: *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life... The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me; Your love, O LORD, endures forever*^{Ps.138:7-8}

But Paul and Barnabas didn't back down. Standing their ground they said, "It was required that God's Word be spoken first of all to you, the Jews. But seeing that you want no part of it—you've made it quite clear that you have no taste or inclination for eternal life—the door is open to all the outsiders. And we're on our way through it, following orders, doing what God commanded when he said, "I've set you up as light to all nations. You'll proclaim salvation to the four winds and seven seas!"^{2Acts13:46-47}

Like Paul & Barnabas, let's continue to love God, believe Him and live for Him as we proclaim God's Salvation to the world and so complete the work He has set out for us.

Sunday January 20th 2013 Ps.92 1Sam.17

Legal Insider Information!

In business *Insider Information* is the knowledge about a publicly traded company that could be used to an investor's advantage. It is illegal when the material information has not been made public and has been traded on. This is because the information gives those having this knowledge an unfair advantage.

Christians have been given information about the Kingdom of God that is not known to the general public and this gives us a legitimate "unfair" advantage over others. Although this information is not secret, unbelievers cannot utilise it because it is only discerned through the Holy Spirit: *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. 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.*^{1Cor.2:13-14} Believers have this "legal" *Insider Information* on God's business! Sadly too many Christians are not using it and so are spiritually bankrupt. As we re-look at the story of David & Goliath, let us use the information to our advantage.

The phrase "*David & Goliath*" is now part of our language and used for describing a situation in which a small person or organization defeats a much larger one in a surprising way. In the Bible narrative, David, a mere teenager, is so disturbed by the blasphemous taunts of the enormous soldier Goliath that he offers to take him on single-handed in order to defend the Name of God as much as to defend his county. Goliath measured "six cubits and a span". A cubit is taken as the measurement from the elbow to the finger-tip (18inches) and a span is the measurement from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger (9inches) making Goliath 9ft 9inches tall. Although many people dismiss this size as an exaggeration, it is not unrealistic when we have several people alive today who are over 8feet tall. In recent history the tallest person was Robert Wadlow who measured 8ft 11.1inches (2.72 m). He was from the USA and lived from 1918 – 1940. The smallest recorded person is Chandra Dangi who is only 21.5inches (54.6 cm). He was born in Nepal in 1939 and is still alive in 2013.

The principles outlined below from the David & Goliath story will help us today and inspire us to overcome every difficulty that we face that opposes God.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.^{2Cor.5:4-5}

1 We must have had an encounter with God. Before David fought Goliath, he was anointed as the new King. Anointing represents the Holy Spirit's empowerment: *So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David.*^{1Sam.16:13} Jesus was anointed to preach: *[Jesus] found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to poor people." [He said] to them, "Today this passage of Scripture is coming true as you listen."*^{1Lk.4:17-21} Jesus commissioned all his disciples (that means you and me!) to also teach about His Kingdom: *Then Jesus came to them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So you must 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. And you can be sure that I am always with you, to the very end."*^{1Matt.28:18-20}

2 We should use what we already have. Later in his life David used armour, but here David was not used to it and so he stayed with what he already knew. When difficulties come we don't need "new" revelations or "extra" power – we already have enough to defeat any and every problem: *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*^{2Pet.1:3-4} It is important to "practice" with the weapons that we have been given **before** we face trouble. David had already fought off attacks from a bear and a lion and won! We have a sword - the Word of God - which is Jesus: *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*^{Eph.6:17} As we learn about Jesus from Scriptures and use it in our prayers and praises to God and our encouraging conversation with others, we are actually practicing for when we will face difficulties: *May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands*^{Psa.149:6} Our faith is a shield to defend against attacks *take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*^{Eph.6:16} The Holy Spirit empowers us to use our weapons: *I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.*^{Eph.3:16-17NLT} In reality it is God who fights on our behalf rather than us having to be "strong": *With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.*^{Psa.60:12} *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*^{1Cor.15:57} But it is our faith that appropriates the victory: *This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*^{1Jn.5:4} David picked up 5 stones^{1Sam.17:40} but only used 1 on Goliath – maybe he picked up the other 4 to attack Goliath's 4 sons! In any case all 4 sons were later defeated.^{2Sam.21:15-22; 1Chron.20:4-8} But it was the sword that actually killed Goliath.^{1Sam.17:51}

3 We represent God. David said to Goliath, *"You are coming to fight against me with a sword, a spear and a javelin. But I'm coming against you in the name of the LORD who rules over all. He is the God of the armies of Israel. He's the one you have dared to fight against. This very day the LORD will hand you over to me..."*^{1Sam.17:45-56} David represented God and so do we: *And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his*

appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"^{2Cor.5:19-20NLT}

Therefore we have no need to be afraid: *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*^{Jos.1:9} God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"^{Heb.13:5-6}

Let's use this *insider information* of **an encounter with God; using what we already have; and representing God** to give us an advantage and so live in the benefits of God's Kingdom.

I'm not alone for my Father is with me, with me, wherever I go;
speaking words of faith, of courage & love - *He's with me, He loves me wherever I go.*

Waking in the morning, getting ready for school, walking down the road,
in class, at work, or at play - *He's with me, He loves me wherever I go.*

And when I find myself in a mess, I can trust in Him,
calling on His name & watching Him move - *He's with me, He loves me wherever I go.*

All of my life, everywhere that I go, I will walk with Him,
praising Him & blessing His name - *He's with me, He loves me wherever I go.*

Sunday January 27th 2013 Ps.93 Acts 14

How should we handle honour?

As Christians we base our life and values on the Bible – not just the writings of Scripture alone but interpreting them through the fact of Jesus' death and resurrection. So we don't just quote a Bible verse and use it as the basis for living our life (either physically or spiritually). Instead we intelligently investigate why it was written and how it fits in to God's strategic plan for mankind: Is it to be taken literally or was it written to illustrate a spiritual value? Is it for us today or has it been superseded by Jesus' death and resurrection? Is it Old Covenant (where sin was between people and God and blocked access to Him^{Is.59:2}), or New Covenant (where Jesus is between us and God and opens a new and living way to Him^{He.10:19})? Whilst specific instructions may change, God never changes (*I the LORD do not change*^{Mal.3:6}) and neither do spiritual principles. **So the whole Bible is always relevant:** *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.*^{2Tim.3:16-17} We should examine God's instructions recorded in Scripture and then put them into operation so that we honour God and make life easier for ourselves. Once we understand this, Christianity becomes much simpler because we can be "fundamentalists" (take God literally) without being fanatical and enthusiastic without being extreme.

We take God's Word seriously because we know that it really works in Believer's lives: *when you received the word of God ...you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*^{1Thes.2:13} *The words I speak ...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.*^{Is.55:11}

To ignore God's instructions will guarantee needless strife and hardship:

What a Friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

O what peace we often forfeit! O what needless pain we bear!

All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Under the New Covenant, there is no hierarchal order of people, priest and high priest nor even congregation, deacon, elder and pastor. The Church is made up of people who have been bought with Jesus blood (His death) and who are now all priests: *You are worthy because you were put to death. With your blood you bought people for God.*

They come from every tribe, language, people and nation. You have made them members of a royal family. You have made them priests to serve our God. They will rule on the earth.^{Rev.11:9-10}

Ephesians 4:11 is often misquoted as stating that Christ has given officers to the Church: *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service.*^{Eph.4:11-12}

The 2010 NIV more accurately translates it: *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people...* The Church is not actually mentioned here and there is nothing about Christ giving these officers to the church. It is a general statement about what Christ has done, 'He gave' not 'He gives'. But these five (or four) gifts are not the only gifts, but, according to verse 7, only examples, - *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.* **Every one of us is a gift and we are also gifted.**

None of the writers of the New Testament ever used the term "Apostle" as a title or rank but only as a description of their calling or gifting: *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.*^{Eph.1:1} *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.*^{1Pet.1:1} In fact Paul was quite scathing about some "apostles": *But I don't think I'm in any way less important than those "super-apostles."* *I may not be a trained speaker. But I do have knowledge. I've made that very clear to you in every way. When I preached God's good news to you free of charge, I put myself down in order to lift you up.*^{2Cor.11:5-7}

It is right to recognise someone's faithfulness, ability or skill and in this country we have an "honours" system which, in principle, is good even though it may sometimes be abused. At the New Year or the Queen's Birthday, people are recognised for their achievements to Society. We also have over 1000 years of hereditary titles where the ruling Sovereign ennobled people in recognition their achievements - although more often, it was a favour for helping them out of some difficulty! Our English language has evolved through time and usage to accommodate noble status. There are 108 Livery Companies in the City of London known as the *Worshipful Company of ... (their trade or profession)*. Town Mayors are addressed as *The Worshipful Mayor of ... (their town)*. Here *Worshipful* does not mean that they are addressed as deities but merely that they are notable or distinguished. In fact our word *worship* comes from the Old English *worthscipe*, meaning *worth-ship* or *worthiness* - showing that something has a value or worth to us. But when something or someone is given more value than is their due, we should be clear where our allegiances lie. *But be careful that you don't forget the LORD... Worship the LORD your God. He is the only one you should serve... The LORD your God is among you. He is a jealous God.*^{Deut.6:12-16}

God gave clear instructions that we should only worship Him. This is because any other object of worship is a deception and a lie: *I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. 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.^{Ex.20:2-5NLT} “There is no God but one.” For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.^{1Cor.8:5-6}

Whilst we should honour and respect people, we should never let them take God’s place. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. And give to God what belongs to God.”^{Matt.22:21} When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.”^{Acts10:25-26} Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”^{Rev.19:9-10} I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”^{Rev.22:8-9}

The godly respect and honour that we give to people should never leave us feeling inferior. To be *born from above*^{Jn.3:3} and called a son of God^{Gal.4:6; Rom.8:16} gives us a spiritual status that supersedes any social status. Without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater^{Heb.7:5} so when Jacob blessed Pharaoh^{Gen.47:3} the Believer (Jacob) showed that he was greater than the most important person in the known world (Pharaoh)! But this importance does not give us the right to dominate or control others. You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.^{Matt.20:25-26} Be shepherds of God's flock... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.^{1Pet.5:3 (also 2Cor.1:24)}

So, how do we handle honour?

Allow people to show their appreciation but don’t take the credit for what God has done and continue to base our principles & precepts on New Covenant teaching.

February

God the Son: *For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.* ^{2Cor.4:5}

Sunday February 3rd 2013 Ps.95

The Tale of Two Sons

What do you think about this? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' "I will not," the son answered. But later he changed his mind and went. "Then the father went to the other son. He said the same thing. The son answered, 'I will, sir.' But he did not go. "Which of the two sons did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "What I'm about to tell you is true. Tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God ahead of you. John came to show you the right way to live. And you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. You saw this. But even then you did not turn away from your sins and believe him. ^{Matt.21:28-32}

Many (well some at least!) of us learnt this tongue-twister at school: *I saw Esau sitting on a see-saw, Esau, he saw, me!* Esau was Isaac's oldest son and he can often stir feelings of pity, for instance the Bible records that God loved Jacob but hated Esau: *"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated."* ^{Mal.1:2-3}

To make sense of the Bible we must understand that its purpose is to explain God's plan of redemption as revealed in Jesus but it does not contain any secret code or hidden meaning. The role of Pastors and Teachers in the Church is to make this plain: *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power... this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.* ^{Eph.3:7-12}

Jesus said we must hate our own father and mother if we are to be his disciple: *Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* ^{Lk.14:25-27}

²⁷ We know that God is love ^{1Jn.4:16} and that He loves all people. ^{Jn.3:16} God loved us when we were sinners not when we were good: *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* ^{Rom.5:8} so what does God really mean when He says He hated (or rejected) Esau? Some translations use *reject* instead of *hate*: *"I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau."* Paul explains that this verse illustrates God's strategic plan for mankind and although we all play a part in it, He is Lord and it is His plan not ours: *What God did in this case made it perfectly plain that his purpose is not a hit-or-miss thing dependent on what we do or don't do, but a sure thing determined by his decision, flowing steadily from his initiative. God told Rebecca, "The firstborn of your twins will take second place." Later that was turned into a stark epigram: "I loved Jacob; I hated Esau."* Is that grounds for complaining that God is unfair? Not so fast, please. God told Moses, *"I'm in charge of mercy. I'm in charge of compassion."* Compassion doesn't originate in our bleeding hearts or moral sweat, but in God's mercy. The same point was made when God said to Pharaoh, *"I picked you as a bit player in this drama of my salvation power."* All we're saying is that God has the first word, initiating the action in which we play our part for good or ill. ^{Rom.9:10-18TM}

Here are some spiritual principles from the story of Esau and his brother Jacob:

1 Natural logic is not spiritual (God's) logic

In Bible times (and still today sometimes) the oldest got the most inheritance (often double) and so was more “important”. When God said that the older would serve the younger, He was going against natural logic: *The LORD said to [Rebekah], “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”* When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. ^{Gen.25:23-26} God’s ways are not ours and He has a wonderful way of turning bad into good and disadvantage into advantage. ^{Rom.8:28} We don’t have to be the successful in the world’s eyes to succeed – we need to be in tune with God and fit into His master plan. *Here's something else I've seen on this earth. Races aren't always won by those who run fast. Battles aren't always won by those who are strong. Wise people don't always have plenty of food. Clever people aren't always wealthy. Those who have learned a lot aren't always favoured. God controls the timing of every event. He also controls how things turn out.* ^{Ecd.9:11}

Actually there is another principle here: the first always belongs to God. In the “Pictionary” of OT history where real life example illustrate spiritual truths, God doesn’t use the 1st born – 1st Adam/Last Adam ^{1Cor.15:45}; Ishmael/Isaac ^{Gen.21:10}; Esau/Jacob ^{Gen.25:23}; Reuben/Judah ^{Gen.55:22}; Manasseh/Ephraim ^{Gen.48:14} God wants us to dedicate the 1st of our income to Him, not the middle or the last: *Bring the best of the first share of your crops to my house. I am the LORD your God.* ^{Lev.23:19} *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income.* ^{1Cor.16:2}

2 Don’t despise your birth-right

Esau despised his birth-right: Jacob replied, “First sell me your birth-right.” “Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birth-right to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birth-right to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birth-right. ^{Gen.25:29-34} Our birth-right is our inheritance from God received through the death (and resurrection) of Jesus – forgiveness of sins and holy living. If we despise this by “selling” it for convenience, political correctness or convenience we are like Esau. Jesus died to make us whole – in our body, mind (soul) and spirit; and He lives to keep us whole. **Good health, full life and prosperity** (of our whole person – spirit soul and body) **is our inheritance in Jesus and the reward of the righteous.** ^{Ps.1:1-3; Prov.13:21; Jn.10:10; 3Jn.1:2} *See to it that no one is godless like Esau. He sold the rights to what he would receive as the oldest son. He sold them for a single meal. As you know, after that he wanted to receive his father's blessing. But he was turned away. With tears he tried to get the blessing. But he couldn't get his father to change his mind.* ^{Heb.12:14-17}

3 There is always a way back to God

Esau didn’t get his expected “birth-right” blessing which he had sold to his brother: Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud. But Isaac still blessed Esau: *It was by faith that Isaac blessed the future of Jacob and Esau.* ^{Heb.11:20} The blessing Isaac gave Esau was that he could shake off the “yoke of servitude” when he grew restless (i.e. when Esau got fed up with living in the consequences of his sin or mistake): *His father Isaac answered him, “Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness, away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will*

serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck. ^{Gen.27:39-40} Yes God has made a way for us to shake of the burden of our sin and past mistakes. God's way is the Anointing, that is His Presence, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; *It shall come to pass in that day That his burden will be taken away from your shoulder, And his yoke from your neck, And the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing.* ^{Is.10:27} The newer translations read *because you have grown so fat*, which helps explain God's anointing – He blesses us so much that that we expand and every yoke (restraint or restriction) is broken. *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.* ^{Rom.8:11}

Don't be like either of the 2 sons Jesus talked about
Let's say we will do God's will and then actually do it!

Sunday February 10th 2013 Ps.96 Acts 15

How to handle disputes

The Council of Jerusalem was convened to discuss a dispute that nearly split the early Church. The 1st major disagreement in the early Church was when people were overlooked ^{Acts 6:1f} and this was quickly resolved by delegating the Pastoral ministry to others. It hurts if we feel we are overlooked, but it is much worse to actually **be** overlooked, especially in the Church! We should each make it our own ministry to ensure the “widows & orphans” (i.e. those who are vulnerable) are given the support they need: *Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.* ^{Jas.1:27} The best way to help others, is to encourage them to be a blessing: *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* ^{Acts 20:35} *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.* ^{2Cor.1:3-4} *I will bless you... I will make your name great. You will be a blessing to others.* ^{Gen.12:3}

Caring for others is at least as important as preaching or praying and so the early Church insisted that these “Carers” were *known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.* ^{Acts 6:3}

We can often encourage others more effectively with a personal touch rather than speaking to a group. Stephen took his opportunity of helping others in practical ways to minister supernaturally: *Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.* ^{Acts 6:8} Wimber's booklet *Kingdom Ministry* (available to download from our Website under *What We Teach/Resources*) explains this principle very well.

The 2nd major disagreement of the early Church came when non-Jews became Christians but did not comply with the Jewish Old Covenant rituals. A similar issue had arisen earlier when Peter preached to Cornelius: *The apostles and the believers all through Judea heard that people who were not Jews had also received God's word... went up to Jerusalem. There the Jewish believers found fault with [Peter]. They said, “You went into the house of those who aren't Jews. You ate with them.” Peter explained everything to them. He told them exactly what had happened.... “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them. He came just as he had come on us at the beginning. ... God gave them the same gift he gave those of us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. So who was I to think that I could oppose God?” When they heard this, they didn't object anymore. They praised God. They said, “So then, God has allowed even those who aren't Jews to turn away from their sins and live.* ^{Acts 11:1-18} This time however, the problem was much more widespread and it nearly split the Church *Then some people came to Antioch from Judea and began teaching the non-Jewish*

believers: "You cannot be saved if you are not circumcised as Moses taught us." Paul and Barnabas were against this teaching and argued with them about it.^{Acts 15:1-2}

This problem actually helped the Church because it provided an opportunity to discuss what God was doing and to clarify the Church's doctrine. *The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this problem. After a long debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God chose me from among you to preach the Good News to the nations. They heard the Good News from me, and they believed. God, who knows the thoughts of everyone, accepted them. He showed this to us by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. To God, those people are not different from us. When they believed, he made their hearts pure. So now why are you testing God by putting a heavy load around the necks of the non-Jewish believers? It is a load that neither we nor our ancestors were able to carry. But we believe that we and they too will be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus."*^{Acts 15:6-11}

The Church is not an up-graded Jewish religion where parts of the Old Covenant are integrated into the New. No! The Church is a New and Living Way Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.^{Rom.7:6} We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through ...his body.^{Heb.10:19-20} In fact the early Church was called **The Way**.^{Acts 9:2;19:9/23;24:22}

The Church is based on the New Covenant instigated by Jesus at His death: And [Jesus] took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, for 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."^{Matt.26:27-8}

The Old (with its rituals, rules and regulations) is redundant and obsolete: When God speaks of a "new" covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear.^{Heb.8:13} Now every Believer has a personal and permanent access to God Himself without the need of rituals. In fact if we try to introduce the Old rituals, we will be enslaved by them and are "fallen away from God's grace": Christ has set us free. He wants us to enjoy freedom. So stand firm. Don't let the chains of slavery hold you again. Here is what I, Paul, say to you. Don't let yourselves be circumcised. If you do, Christ won't be of any value to you. I say it again. Every man who lets himself be circumcised must obey the whole law. Some of you are trying to be made right with God by obeying the law. You have been separated from Christ. You have fallen away from God's grace.^{Gal.5:2-4}

This disagreement in the early Church was resolved when they heard what God was doing: Everyone became quiet as they listened to Barnabas and Paul. They were telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among non-Jews.^{Acts 15:12}

Giving testimony to God's miracles is much more effective than a debate or an argument and is part of our spiritual weaponry: They triumphed over him 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.^{Rev.12:11-12} Don't get caught up in disputes without sharing what God is doing in your life and through you.

James then applied a scripture to their situation which brought the matter to a godly conclusion: *After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. I will rebuild what was destroyed. I will make it what it used to be. Then the rest of the people can look to the Lord. This means all the non-Jews who belong to me. The Lord says this. He is the one who does these things.* (^{Am 9:11,12})^{Acts 15:16-17}

David's Tent was for Praise, Payer and Prophecy: The ark of God was ...put in the tent David had set up for it... David wanted them to pray, give thanks and praise the LORD.^{1Chron.16:1-4} David ...set them apart to serve the LORD by prophesying while harps, lyres and cymbals were being played.^{1Chron.25:1}

We can be different without being divisive! *I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.*^{1Cor.1:10} 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.^{1Cor.18:19} Sometimes though we have to stand our ground and stand up for the Truth: Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.^{Jude 1:3} However we should: Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.^{Eph.4:2-3} All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.^{Phil.3:15-16}

As we focus on New Covenant prayer, proper praise (saying good words about God not sentimental wishes about how we feel or what we want to do!) **and true prophecy** (For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.^{Rev.19:9NLT}) **we will see that our differences are manageable if we are prepared to listen to the Holy Spirit and obey His leading.** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.^{Rev.2:7}

“When you pray for me it is as if you are sitting next to me in Church”

Sunday February 17th 2013 Ps.97 Acts 15:30-16:10

Have you encouraged someone in their faith today?

The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.^{Acts15:31-32}

Prophets are to Exhort, Encourage and Edify the Church.^{1Cor.14:3-5} This is not an extinct ministry that died out with the 12 Disciples of Jesus but is very much a ministry for the whole of the Church era. Prophecy will *cease when perfection comes*^{1Cor.13:8-10} but until that time we need the ministry of people who will **exhort, encourage and edify**. The first mention of a Prophet is Abraham. God said to Abimelech: *Now return the man's wife, for [Abraham] is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die.*^{Gen.20:7}

Prophets pray effective prayers because they have a relationship with God and speak the truth about Him! My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.^{Job.42:8} Being righteous doesn't make us weird or “other-worldly” but it does give us a right-standing before God that makes our prayers powerfully effective: *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*^{Jas.5:16-18}

Church is a place where we are *strengthened in the faith*^{Acts16:5} because *God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety.*^{Eph.3:10} Faith is not a feeling or a fantasy or even a philosophy but fact! Faith is the absolute trust in God that is based on His Character, Reputation and Word as revealed in Jesus Christ His Son. But the Christian life is not based on **our** faith but on **God Himself**. Our faith can be so unstable and is often affected by our feelings & circumstances but our relationship with

God is based on Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. This means we don't need a lot of faith – just living faith: *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.*^{Lk.17:5-6} We are to encourage one another with testimonies of what God has done.

We will always be amazed at what God does but we should never be surprised!

So how do we encourage edify and establish one another in our faith?

By Prayer, Praise & Prophecy (c.f. **David's Tent**,^{Acts15:16-17} which we saw last week, was for **Payer, Praise and Prophecy**^{1Chron.16:1-4;25:1}): *What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*^{1Cor14:26}

Prayer: Prayer is not a "shopping list" of "please bless me's". The lowest level of Christianity is to be blessed because every Believer has **already** been abundantly blessed: *Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Those blessings come from the heavenly world. They belong to us because we belong to Christ.*^{Eph.1:3} **The highest level of Christianity is to be a blessing:** *God says: I will bless you. I will make your name great. You will be a blessing to others.*^{Gen.12:2} Prayer is fellowship with the Father, aligning our thoughts and dreams with His, then listening to the response and guidance of His Word and of His Spirit. Prayer is interceding for the needs of fellow-believers, then listening for God's ideas of what we can do about them - of ways we can be part of the answer. Prayer is never pleading or begging for divine favours. That is why Jude writes: *Dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith. Let the Holy Spirit guide and help you when you pray.*^{Jude 1:19-20}

Praise: Hymns and spiritual songs are an important part of the encouragement, edifying and establishing of our faith. Most people's Theology (what they believe about God) is formed by the songs they sing, so it is imperative that we sing the Truth and not sentimental, emotional lyrics that have little relevance to New Covenant Truth. Elizabeth Pruitt Sloan says: *"Much of today's Christian songs don't do anything for me. They have no tune, no melody, and no anointing. But give me some of the old songs, or new ones that exalt the Blood of Jesus, and my spirit just soars!"* This has led Mel Montgomery to add *Songs of Inspiration* to his website (www.brothermel.org) so we can (re)learn some of the good old and new hymns. Our praise should be passionate if it is really expressing our worth-ship of God!

Prophecy: this is not spiritual insight into other people's lives (although this may occur) but simply the testimony of Jesus: *For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. (What Jesus taught is the very heart of prophecy.*^{NIV^{Re}19:10} As we testify about Jesus (especially from the Scriptures) we find that have the same experience as the 1st Disciples: *They said to each other, "He talked with us on the road. He opened the Scriptures to us. Weren't our hearts burning inside us during that time?"*^{Lk.24:32} Sharing Jesus from the Scriptures leads to **Revelation and**

Instructions *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.*^{Rom15:4}

Tongues and interpretation are also some of the tools that God has given to the Church but are not my usual gifting – are they yours? **Whatever our gifting we should be eager to use it** *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*^{1Cor.14:39-40}

Let's make it our intention to encourage someone each day and especially when we meet as Church so that we each *prepare God's people to serve. [Then] the body of Christ will*

be built up. That will continue until we all become one in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son. Then we will be grown up in the faith. We will receive everything that Christ has for us. We will no longer be babies in the faith. We won't be like ships tossed around by the waves. We won't be blown here and there by every new teaching. We won't be blown around by the cleverness and tricks of people who try to hide their evil plans. Instead, we will speak the truth in love. We will grow up into Christ in every way. He is the Head. He makes the whole body grow and build itself up in love. Under the control of Christ, each part of the body does its work. It supports the other parts. In that way, the body is joined and held together.^{Eph.4:12-16}

Sunday February 24th 2013 Ps.42 Acts 16:11f

Who's in charge here?

Never apologise for the Gospel. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.*^{Rom.1:16} There really is no “cringe-factor” with the Gospel, although there maybe with some people's presentation of it. The facts about God and the good news through Jesus Christ are an integral part of our life – who we are – so it is natural that we should involve God in our activities and conversation. It would be hypocritical and dishonouring to God if we did not publicly live out our faith!

However we should to be wise and show sensitivity in the way we represent Jesus Christ or we will lose credibility. *So be as wise (shrewd) as snakes and as harmless as doves.*^{Matt.10:16} *Give me the common sense to apply Your rules to everything I do.*^{Ps.119:125TLB}

Jesus told a story to illustrate how Believers sometimes don't use their initiative enough: *For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their contemporaries than the people of light.*^{Lk.16:8NET} Jesus always publicly gave thanks to God to set an example for us: *Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.*^{Matt.14:19} Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.”^{Jn.11:41-42NLT}

We should never be intimidated into silence when opposition comes but rather use every situation to show our appreciation of God and especially Jesus Christ – after all He endured suffering gladly so we might become His family and share the rest of our lives with Him. *Suppose you are ashamed of me and my words among these adulterous and sinful people. Then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.*^{Mk.8:38} *God didn't give us a spirit that makes us weak and fearful. He gave us a spirit that gives us power and love. It helps us control ourselves. So don't be ashamed to give witness about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, his prisoner. Instead, join with me as I suffer for the good news. God's power will help us do that... But I'm not ashamed. I know the One I have believed in. I am sure he is able to take care of what I have given him. I can trust him with it until the day he returns as judge.*^{2Tim.1:7-8} *But suppose you suffer for being a Christian. Then don't be ashamed. Instead, praise God because you are known by that name.*^{1Pet.4:16} Paul was an apostle and functioned in that ministry but he was not a demon-hunter on a mission to deliver everyone. In fact at Philippi he tolerated for many days the demon-possessed girl's sneering and jeering pronouncement: “These men serve the Most High God. They are telling you how to be saved.”^{Acts16:17} (Not everyone who talks about Christianity is a true Believer – even demons sometimes talk about Jesus.^{Acts19:15}) Eventually Paul ran out of patience and commanded the evil spirit to leave her. Some people are too quick to intervene and end up promoting superstition and lies because they speculate about a situation and imagine things that are not true.

We should never use a single verse of Scripture to dictate what we do in any given situation but instead we should take the principles of the New Covenant Kingdom and use our godly wisdom to apply them. The Bible is not a book of “spells” or formulæ but a living legacy for us to use with the wisdom God has given to us: *If any of you need wisdom, ask God for it. He will give it to you. God gives freely to everyone. He doesn't find fault. But when you ask, you must believe. You must not doubt. People who doubt are like waves of the sea. The wind blows and tosses them around. A man like that shouldn't expect to receive anything from the Lord. He can't make up his mind. He can never decide what to do.*^{Jas.1:5-8}

When we do apply New Covenant principles we are guaranteed success but not as the world sees success. The success we are guaranteed is God's commendation *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.*^{Matt.25:21}

Often our obedience to God and Kingdom principles leads to a confrontation with this world's system which can result in open or hidden opposition. For most of us it usually only results in a scorn or feeling of being shunned but for Paul and Silas it meant a flogging and chained imprisonment. However they were still in control of the situation and sang praises to God (sang good words about God) through the night. There are 2 Hebrew words that have more or less the same literal meaning but are actually exact opposites: **yadah** and **pasha**. **Yadah** which comes from the root word meaning “to throw out” and is used to convey the stretching out of hands as an expression of praise. So Judah became a word for praise *Then [Leah] said, “This time I'll praise (yadah) the LORD.” So she named him Judah (Yehudah).*^{Gen.29:35} **LORD, I will praise (yadah) you with all my heart. I will tell about all of the miracles you have done.**^{Ps.9:1} **Pasha** comes from the root word meaning to “shake the fist” and so has come to mean revolt or rebel: *I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled (pasha) against me.*^{Is.1:2} Raising hands in thanksgiving to God or shaking the fist in rebellion may look the same to someone watching but they are completely opposite. We must not only do the right action but do it with the right attitude! Another Hebrew word for Praise is **Barak** which means to kneel hence to submit to God's authority and honour Him as Lord: *Bless (barak) the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless (barak) his holy name!*^{Ps.103:1} But this word **barak** is also translated curse: *Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job's regular custom.*^{Job.1:5}

God looks at the heart: *My son Solomon, always remember the God of your father. Serve him with all your heart. Do it with a mind that wants to obey him. The LORD looks deep down inside every heart. He understands the real reasons for everything you think. If you look to him, you will find him. But if you desert him, he will turn his back on you forever. Think about it. The LORD has chosen you to build a temple as a holy place where he can live. So be strong. Get to work.*^{1Chron.28:9-10} An action that does not come from the heart may look good but it can be a curse – it depends on the motive!

What should we do in difficult times? Going through the motion of honouring God is not enough, we must *Love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind.*^{Matt.22:37} We should never blame God for the bad things but recognise that we are in a sinful world where bad things happen: *In all this Job did not sin or blame God (ascribe God with anything offensive or wrong).*^{Job.1:22} *His wife said to him, “Are you still continuing to be faithful to the LORD? Speak evil things against him and die!” Job replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. We accept good things from God. So we should also accept trouble when he sends it.” In spite of everything, Job didn't say anything that was sinful.*^{Job.2:9-10}

The right thing to do is to always give thanks to God in every situation: *I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. (Let those who are hurting hear and be joyful.^{NIV}) Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt (honour) his name together.^{Ps.34:1-3} Give thanks no matter what happens. God wants you to thank him because you believe in Christ Jesus.^{1Thes.5:18}*

God is Good and what He does is Good^{Ps.119:68} *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... God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else... So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.^{Jas.1:12-17}*

When we are truly convinced of the facts about God we will never be intimidated by our circumstances but, like Paul and Silas, we will take every opportunity to honour Jesus Christ and so be truly successful.

Take charge of your life and honour God: *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.^{Ps.42:11}*

March

God the Holy Spirit *Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”* Gal.4:6

Sunday March 3rd 2013 Ps.99 Acts 17

Do you have healthy genes!

Each cell in our body contains about 30,000 genes, which carry information that go toward determining our characteristics we inherit from our parents and we have about 50 trillion (50 million million) cells! *Our genes are unique – unless we are identical twins. Half of our genes are from our mother, the other half are from our father, who, in turn, received their genes from their parents, and so on, right back to our earliest ancestors. Genes may predispose us to certain behaviour, but they don't determine our personality. Genes affect our chances of having several common illnesses, like heart disease, asthma and diabetes but so do many other factors, such as diet and lifestyle. It is like betting on a horse race – the horse, rider, course and weather can all affect the outcome in a way that is hard to predict. Many genetic and non-genetic factors affect our health, but scientists don't yet know what they all are, or how they interact with each other.* www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/WhoAmI

Family traits and characteristics such as colour, size and shape can be traced back many generations which is especially helpful when breeding animals to a type. Some animals have recorded pedigrees stretching back hundreds of years. All Thoroughbred horses can trace their pedigrees back to three stallions originally imported into England in the 17th and 18th centuries: the Byerley Turk (1680s), the Darley Arabian (1704), and the Godolphin Arabian (1729). *[Byerley Turk was captured from the Turks by Captain Robert Byerley at the Battle of Buda [Budapest] (1686) – a war in Hungary against the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, as part of the follow-up campaign in Hungary after the Battle of Vienna. Byerley Turk served as Byerley's war horse when he was dispatched to Ireland in 1689 and saw further military service in the Battle of the Boyne]*

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character (open-minded^{NLT}) than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ^{Acts 17:11}

This word translated “**noble**” is literally “**good genes**” and reminds me of Is.51: *Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth.* ^{Is.51:1-2} Believers are from good “breeding stock” – we can trace our spiritual roots back to Abraham who “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ^{Gal.3:6-7} So then, *[Abraham] is the father of all who believe.* ^{Rom.4:11} **We should never forget who we are and who our family ancestors are.** Just as runners run, walkers walk and writers write, so **Believers believe** – we believe in our heart that God raised [Jesus] from the dead, [and are] saved. ^{Rom.10:9}

Christianity is not about being perfect (although we should aspire to perfection) or even being better than others (although we should aspire to be the best). **Christianity is about believing God** – what He has said about Jesus and about us: *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well... We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has*

the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.^{1Jn.5:1-12}

Sadly many people in Churches are unaware of what God has recorded in the Scriptures and so miss out on the blessings of believing and possibly even eternal life! Johan Westhysen (who came to our church in 2005) wrote recently: *Over the 22 years that we have been in ministry I taught on just about every Bible subject one can think off, however, we came to realize that there is a great need for the basic principles of the Christian faith. For example, we have far too often come across churches where more than 50% of the members were not even sure of their salvation and many who say they are saved based their faith on their works. This is not just the case with churches in overseas countries, but in our own country as well. It is so easy for a seasoned minister to assume that all church members understand the Gospel of our Lord and the truths about His Kingdom. It is worse when Bible preachers and teachers think that the Gospel and Biblical truths must be adjusted to suit a post modern world where humanism and relativism is more important to many than Biblical values that stood the test of time. Somebody once said that the church has many believers but few disciples.* (www.wtwministries.co.za)

Being “noble” or “open minded” does not mean that we accept everything that is spoken “in the name of God” but that we check it out from the Scriptures to see if it is true. **However we must interpret the Scriptures through the facts of Jesus’ Death, Resurrection and Ascension** or we will still be in error. Those tumultuous events split the world in two and released the Holy Spirit –the “river of Living Water”: *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south... On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter. The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.*^{Zech.14:5-9} *After Jesus said this, he was taken up to heaven. They watched until a cloud hid him from their sight.... The apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.*^{Acts 1:9-12} *On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*^{Jn.7:37-39}

The two kingdoms in this world (kingdom of Light and kingdom of darkness) are now quite distinct and it is the Holy Spirit Who separates: *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.*^{Col.1:12-14} *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.*^{1Pet.2:9-10}

Before the death of Jesus the distinction between the two kingdoms was blurred as God had only revealed Himself to Israel, His Chosen People. But even for Israel, God was a Visitor and they could only meet Him at the Ark of the Covenant (which was eventually situated in Jerusalem) *Put the altar in front of the curtain that shields the ark of the covenant law—before the atonement cover that is over the tablets of the covenant law—where I will meet with you.*^{Ex.30:6}

Now there is a clear distinction between the 2 kingdoms and it is not colour, creed or

culture but the Holy Spirit: *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.*"^{Acts 17:30-31} God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.^{Rom. 3:25-26}

UnBelievers do not understand spiritual things because they do not have the Holy Spirit: *We have not received the spirit of the world. 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.*^{1Cor. 1:12-14}

Moses used to cover his face so people could not see if God had left him or not: *Moses finished speaking to them. Then he put a veil over his face. But when he would go to speak with the LORD, he would remove the veil. He would keep it off until he came out. Then he would tell the people what the LORD had commanded. They would see that his face was shining. So Moses would put the veil back over his face. He would keep it on until he went in again to speak with the LORD.*^{Ex. 34:33-35}

Under the New Covenant God will never leave us: *God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can human beings do to me?"*^{Heb. 13:5-6} So we can display God's glory (Presence) all the time: *We are not like Moses. He used to cover his face with a veil. That was to keep the people of Israel from looking at his face while the brightness was fading away. But their minds were made stubborn. 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. Our faces are not covered with a veil. We all display the Lord's glory. We are being changed to become more like him so that we have more and more glory. And the glory comes from the Lord, who is the Holy Spirit.*^{2Cor. 3:13-18}

Let us live as "noble" people who have the very best spiritual "genes" and continue to think, act, talk, pray and sing as Believers! *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.*^{Eph. 1:18-19}

Sunday March 10th 2013 Ps.128

What is so important about the Family?

A family is a social group where each is related and valued. In families, the mature are honoured and the young are nurtured but everyone is appreciated for their own intrinsic value (rather than for what they can do). It is their involvement and inter-action that makes a family function – without that they are a dis-functional family (which is really a contradiction-in-terms). The foundation for the family is Marriage which is built on a Covenant (a non-negotiable contract). This commitment is intended to be the basis for life-long companionship and also to provide the security to procreate children.

The family originates from God: *For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen*

you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.^{Eph.3:14-17} In fact Adam is called “the son of God”: Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph... the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz... the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham... the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.^{Lk.3:23-38} When Adam and Eve sinned they could no longer claim to be God’s children because they were spiritually dead. All of Adam’s descendants inherited his fallen nature of being spiritually dead and separate from God. However, God does have a family again now: *In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. 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.*^{Heb.2:10-11} But it is only by the New Birth that we can be included in God’s family again. Jesus replied, “What I’m about to tell you is true. No one can see God’s kingdom without being born again.” “How can I be born when I am old?” Nicodemus asked. “I can’t go back inside my mother! I can’t be born a second time!” Jesus answered, “What I’m about to tell you is true. No one can enter God’s kingdom without being born through water (naturally) and the Holy Spirit (spiritually). 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.’”^{Jn.3:3-7}

God’s family is made up of Believers – those who have been “born again” and whose past is forgiven – they are the Church: *Anyone who believes in Christ is a new creation. The old is gone! The new has come! It is all from God. He brought us back to himself through Christ’s death on the cross. And he has given us the task of bringing others back to him through Christ. God was bringing the world back to himself through Christ. He did not hold people’s sins against them. God has trusted us with the message that people may be brought back to him.*^{2Cor.5:17-19}

Church is for everyone – male and female, young and old, married and single. Being single is good - we are born single and we will die single, but being alone is not good (whether we marry or not): *God sets the lonely in families.*^{P.s.68:6} There is no excuse for Believers to stay lonely: *One who has isolated himself seeks his own desires; he rejects all sound judgment.*^{Prov.18:1NET} Marriage is not for everyone though: But Jesus said, “Not everyone is mature enough to live a married life. It requires a certain aptitude and grace. Marriage isn’t for everyone. Some, from birth seemingly, never give marriage a thought. Others never get asked—or accepted. And some decide not to get married for kingdom reasons. But if you’re capable of growing into the largeness of marriage, do it.”^{Mat.19:11-12TM}

In God’s Family (the Church) we can be sustained and supported. We should honour the mature, nurture the young and appreciate everyone for their own intrinsic value rather than for what they can do. It is our **involvement and inter-action** that makes us a functional Church instead of a dis-functional Church. *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*^{Gal.6:9-10} His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*^{Eph.3:10-12}

Yet the Church is much more than a family – it is Christ’s pure and holy Bride: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant*

church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.^{Eph.5:25-27} “Hallelujah! Our Lord God is the King who rules over all. Let us be joyful and glad! Let us give him glory! It is time for the Lamb's wedding. His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.” Fine linen stands for the right things that God's people do.^{Rev.19:6-8}

So we have a responsibility to honour Christ including keeping to His rules on morality: 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.” ...The man said, “Her bones have come from my bones. Her body has come from my body. She will be named ‘woman,’ because she was taken out of a man.” That's why a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. The two of them will become one. The man and his wife were both naked. They didn't feel any shame.^{Gen.2:18-25} All of you should honour marriage. You should keep the marriage bed pure. God will judge the person who commits adultery. He will judge everyone who commits sexual sins.^{Heb.13:4} The LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth... she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant... You belong to [God] in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. “The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.^{Mal.2:13-16}

The mystery of Christ and the Church is illustrated by Marriage: For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.^{Eph.5:31-32} **So when the “wedding supper of the Lamb”^{Rev.19:9} arrives,** (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^{Rev.21:2}) **our physical marriage will be superseded by an eternal relationship with Jesus:** At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.^{Matt.22:30} The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.^{Lk.20:34-36}

Husband, your wife is your lot in this life so enjoy her now!

Wife, your husband is your lot in this life so enjoy him now!

“Types” and “shadows” (pictorial previews) are temporary until the real object arrives when they become obsolete: When God speaks of a “new” covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear.^{Heb.8:13} The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves.^{Heb.11:1} These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.^{Col.2:17}

So let us live as God's Family, honouring and appreciating God and each other: I will try to walk a blameless path, but how I need your help, especially in my own home, where I long to act as I should^{Ps.101:2TLB}

Adam was a handsome man

Adam was a handsome man, God made him from dust,
He placed him in a garden fair, away from sin & lust.
Adam was a perfect man but one thing makes me glum,
Although he lived in paradise, he never had a Mum!

Adam was a special man, he had a job to do,
He named the birds, he named the beasts as God had told him to,
He also gave the fruit its name, like apple, pear & plum,
And although he lived in paradise, he never had a Mum!

Eve was made from Adam's rib, a woman fair was she,
Her hair was long, her teeth were white, a perfect sight to see;
Adam fell in love with her, he said "I'm glad you've come
For though I live in paradise, I've never had a Mum!"

Eve & Adam lost their home in that sweet garden fair,
Sin had crept into their lives to drive them to despair;
They had to work & toil all day, from dawn to setting sun.
Who could they tell their troubles to? They never had a Mum!

People here on earth today, remember that first pair
Who never grew up in a home with other kids to share;
They may have had a paradise but when all's said and done,
You nearly have had everything, when you have had a Mum!

Sunday 17th March 2013 Ps.100 Acts 18

How well do you know the Scriptures?

The Bible is the story of God's plan of Redemption as revealed in Jesus Christ and everything we need to know about God and His Kingdom is recorded in it. Although it is divided into two parts – Old Testament and New Testament, it is now a single unit making a complete library (our English word *Bible* is from the Greek word for library). However the OT rituals and requirements are now obsolete because they were only a picture of what Jesus was going to introduce. Apollos knew the Scriptures and taught about Jesus accurately but he only knew part of the story! He knew about forgiveness of sins but had not experienced the filling of the Spirit! He knew that Jesus had been *delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification*^{Rom.4:25} but did not know that Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit.^{Jn.7:39}

We are not only forgiven but we are family – God's family! *Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*^{Gal.4:6} When Jesus came He introduced the Kingdom of God but it was not the kingdom the Jews were looking for. **Jesus' Kingdom is the rule of Christ in our hearts now** - an internal Kingdom, not a political kingdom. **It is an active submission to Jesus' will and desire** not an active (or even passive) submission to self-will or any other dominance of our hearts and minds. People who are looking for a physical or geographical kingdom misunderstand Jesus' teaching *Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God*

would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you". ^{Lk.17:20-21}

Because Jesus' kingdom has already begun, the benefits and blessings of God's Kingdom have also begun - they are for us here and now and not just when we die.

Jesus taught that His Kingdom required a new attitude because it was very different from the other kingdoms of the world which all opposed God: "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way. ^{Matt.5:3-12NLT}

John the Baptist's ministry and work was to prepare people for God's Kingdom under the Messiah whom he named as Jesus. [John preached] a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation. ^{Lk.3:3-6} The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him. John said, "Look! The Lamb of God! He takes away the sin of the world! This is the One I was talking about. ^{Jn.1:29-30} As John preached, he exhorted people to repent (change their minds) and to live a godly life: Produce fruit in keeping with repentance... The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same... Don't collect any more than you are required to... Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay... And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. ^{Lk.3:18-18}

This Kingdom of God would be under 'new management' which would necessitate a change in the Jewish religion. The existing religious tradition (even though it had stood the test of time for 1000's of years) would become obsolete as a better and final "religion" – the New Covenant - was introduced. This New Covenant would really work and would never need replacing at a later date. As with any code of morals or set of values, the Old Covenant's weakness was not in its standard but in the implementing of it. Ever since Adam sinned, humanity is by nature opposed to God thus making it impossible for mankind to totally obey God: The human mind is more deceitful than anything else. It is incurably bad. ^{Jer.17:9NET} There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. ^{Rom.3:10-11}

There are many differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant but perhaps the greatest difference is the forgiveness of sins leading to a good conscience before God. [The Old Covenant was] not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper... 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, so that we may serve the living God! ^{Heb.9:9-14} Christians are still capable of doing wrong - both unintentionally and intentionally, but under the New Covenant our sins do not separate us from God. We are inseparably joined to Him through the Holy Spirit and His abiding presence empowers us to continue to live for Him: But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in the Spirit. ^{1Cor.6:17}

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.^{1Pet.1:23}

Although Jesus introduced God's Kingdom, it did not properly start until Jesus returned to His Father and sent the Holy Spirit as His replacement: *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.*^{Acts2:32-33} *"When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."*^{Jn.15:26} *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*^{Jn.14:16-17} *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.*^{Acts2:8} *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.*^{Acts2:38-39}

It was this next part of God's plan – the outpouring, indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit - that Apollos had not heard about and which Priscilla and Aquila explained to him: *[He] was accurate in everything he taught about Jesus up to a point, but he only went as far as the baptism of John. He preached with power in the meeting place. When Priscilla and Aquila heard [Apollos], they took him aside and told him the rest of the story.*^{Acts18:25-26TM}

There is more to Christianity than having our sins forgiven – we are now God's Family. God has high expectations for us and we have a Family reputation to uphold - God's good Name is in our care! **Don't settle for half the story but read the end of the book!** *"These are dependable and accurate words, every one... Let evildoers do their worst and the dirty-minded go all out in pollution, but let the righteous maintain a straight course and the holy continue on in holiness."* *"Yes, I'm on my way! I'll be there soon! I'm bringing my payroll with me. I'll pay all people in full for their life's work. I'm A to Z, the First and the Final, Beginning and Conclusion. "How blessed are those who wash their robes! The Tree of Life is theirs for good, and they'll walk through the gates to the City. But outside for good are the filthy curs: sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters—all who love and live lies. "I, Jesus, sent my Angel to testify to these things for the churches. I'm the Root and Branch of David, the Bright Morning Star." "Come!" say the Spirit and the Bride. Whoever hears, echo, "Come!" Is anyone thirsty? Come! All who will, come and drink, Drink freely of the Water of Life! ... "I'm on my way! I'll be there soon!" Yes! Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you. Oh, Yes!"*^{Rev.21}

Sunday March 24th 2013 Ps.101 Acts 19

How would you plan your last week?

Jesus spent His last week ensuring all the final details of His ministry were completed. He was determined to return to His Father knowing that everything that was expected and asked of Him was completed which included making sure that the prophecies in Scripture were fulfilled: *Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.*^{Jn.12:16} Some of the prophecies are statements of facts about the Messiah, such as: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*^{Is.9:6} Other prophecies are more like signposts or pointers to confirm that Jesus was the Messiah, such as: *Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a*

donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.^{Zech.9:9} Jesus ensured that the Jews had all the evidence they needed to believe that He was the Messiah, the Son of God: *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*^{Matt.16:16} But sadly most did not believe: *Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in front of them. But they still would not believe in him. This happened as Isaiah the prophet had said it would.*^{Jn.12:37-38} *As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes"*^{Lk.19:41-42}

Even apparent coincidences were orchestrated by God to explain the real purpose of Jesus' ministry: *Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume... Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."*^{Jn.12:3-8}

God has made it so easy for us to believe in Him – to believe that Jesus is His Son and our Saviour. God has presented enough evidence for anyone to believe this, but because of our inherited spiritual condition, which is described as being “dead” and “blind”, it takes a miracle to believe: *First they wouldn't believe, then they couldn't—again, just as Isaiah said: Their eyes are blinded, their hearts are hardened, so that they wouldn't see with their eyes and perceive with their hearts, and turn to me, God, so I could heal them.*^{Jn.12:39-40} However, miracles are what God excels at: *You are the God who performs miracles; You display your power among the peoples.*^{Ps.77:14} **A miracle is when God does something for us that we cannot do for ourselves!**

We may have been “blind” to God – unable to appreciate Him or even acknowledge Him in our lives, but: *faith in Christ can take [our blindness] 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.*^{2Cor.3:14-16}

To reject Jesus, and all He stands for, is to reject God and receive eternal condemnation: *Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me... I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. "If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."*^{Jn.12:44-50} When Adam and Eve rejected God's authority and tried to live under their own rules, they set a precedence which has beset mankind ever since. *Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD? Why should I obey him? ...I don't even know the LORD."*^{Ex.5:2} *He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*^{2Thes.1:8}

To believe God, is to acknowledge His authority over us: *Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*^{Ps.100:3} *My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*^{Gal.2:20} **We have a duty to honour God because He made us and sustains us, but we also have an desire to honour God because He loves us:** *We love because he first loved us.*^{1Jn.4:19} *For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*^{Rom.5:5} *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*^{1Jn.3:1}

Jesus knew that He had just a few days to live: *It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.*^{Jn.13:1} But few of us have that advantage: *No one knows what lies ahead. So who can tell a person what's going to happen? He can't stop the wind from blowing. And he doesn't have the power to decide when he will die.*^{Ecd.8:7-8} **So it is important we live our lives in the confidence that we are doing what God wants us to do.** Then it doesn't matter what happens to us here: *For me, life finds all of its meaning in Christ. Death also has its benefits. Suppose I go on living in my body. Then I will be able to carry on my work. It will bear a lot of fruit. But what should I choose? I don't know. I can't decide between the two. I long to leave this world and be with Christ. That is better by far. But it is more important for you that I stay alive. I'm sure of that. So I know I will remain with you.*^{Phil.1:21-24} Although *"Heaven is wonderful place, filled with glory and grace, I'm going to see my Saviour's face, Heaven is a wonderful place"*, we are not there yet (physically) and we still have a life-time of work to do! Too often people are so focused on their destination that they don't enjoy the journey getting there. *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*^{Col.3:17} Remember that *"goodness and mercy (love) follow us all the days of our life."*^{Ps.23:6} This life is a preparation for the next, so let us continue to make every day count – utilising every minute that God gives us and appreciating every breath we take. As this song reminds us, *may every day be the 1st day of the rest of our lives: Morning has broken, like the first morning; Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird. Praise for the singing, praise for the morning, Praise for them springing fresh from the word.* **Yes, we can enjoy this life in the certainty of an even better life to come:** *What should we say then? Since God is on our side, who can be against us? God did not spare his own Son. He gave him up for us all. Then won't he also freely give us everything else?*^{Rom.8:31-32} **Let's glorify God and enjoy Him today and then encourage others to do the same:** *And I will continue with all of you to help you grow and be joyful in what you have been taught.*^{Phil.1:25}

Easter Sunday 31st March Ps.24 Jn.20

Three facts about Jesus' Resurrection that can change your life:

1 Jesus' Resurrection was Permanent – it was irreversible.

When Jesus died, His body was placed in a tomb^{Lk.23:53} like many other people who died. But unlike any other person, Jesus' body did not decay^{Acts 2:31;13:37} and He was raised to life with an immortal body^{1Cor.15:43;53} – a body that was not limited by natural physics. He had a real body with flesh and bones^{Lk.24:39} that could be touched^{Jn.20:27} yet He could appear and disappear,^{Lk.24:31} walk through doors or doorways,^{Jn.20:26} eat or not eat.^{Acts10:41} The Bible records several people who were raised to life^{1Kings17:22;2Kings4:36;Heb.11:35} and Jesus raised at least 3 people to life (as did Peter^{Acts 9:40} and Paul^{Acts 20:9}) yet all these people had the same mortal body as before and later they died again! But when Jesus was raised from the dead His body was immortal – He would never die again. *But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*^{Acts2:24} *This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*^{2Tim.1:9-10} *And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died 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.*^{Heb.9:27-28}

2 Jesus' Resurrection Paid the Penalty for our sin.

When Jesus died, it was not because of His wrongdoings, but ours - He was bearing our punishment for our sins: *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. All of us are like sheep. We have wandered away from God. All of us have turned to our own way. And the LORD has placed on his servant the sins of all of us.* ^{Is.53:4-6} If Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would only surmise that our sins were forgiven. But because Jesus did rise from the dead we now **KNOW** that our sins are forgiven and we have peace with God. *Jesus our Lord... was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.* ^{Rom.4:24-25}

Our peace with God is based on fact that Jesus was raised from the dead: *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! ...But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.* ^{1Cor.15:17-20}

Our new birth and certain hope of everlasting life is based on the resurrection of Jesus: *Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us a new birth and a hope that is alive. It is alive because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He has given us new birth so that we might share in what belongs to him. It is a gift that can never be destroyed. It can never spoil or even fade away. It is kept in heaven for you. Through faith you are kept safe by God's power. Your salvation is going to be completed. It is ready to be shown to you in the last days.* ^{1Pet.1:3-5}

3 Jesus' Resurrection set a Precedent for other resurrections.

Jesus was born as God's *one and only Son* ^{In.3:16} but after He rose from the dead Jesus became God's "firstborn". *Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead.* ^{Rev.1:5} *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.* ^{Col.1:18} To be a "firstborn", there must be more children: *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* ^{Rom.8:29} *I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen - that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.* ^{Acts26:22-23} Because Jesus has been raised from the dead we know that we too shall rise to everlasting life: *By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.* ^{1Cor.6:14} *We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.* ^{2Cor.4:14}

Yes because Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead we can have the assurance we will live after we die. *Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die."* ^{Jn.11:25-26} If we believe God's testimony about Jesus we will rise from the dead unto eternal life. Death will not be an enemy but a gateway to a future life with Jesus where no sin, sickness or sorrow exists. *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."* *He who was sitting on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down. You can trust these words. They are true.* ^{Rev.21:3-5}

In order to gain an immortal body we must put off our mortal body i.e. we have to die. *We know that the earthly tent we live in will be destroyed. But we have a building made by God. It is a house in heaven that lasts forever. Human hands did not build it. During our time on earth we groan. We long to put on our house in heaven as if it were clothing. Then we will not be naked. While we live in this tent of ours, we groan under our heavy load. We don't want to be naked. We want to be dressed with our house in heaven. What must die will be swallowed up by life. God has made us for that very purpose. He has given us the Holy Spirit as a down payment. The Spirit makes us sure of what is still to come. So here is what we can always be certain about. As long as we are at home in our bodies, we are away from the Lord. We live by believing, not by seeing. We are certain about that. We would rather be away from our bodies and at home with the Lord. So we try our best to please him. We want to please him whether we are at home in our bodies or away from them. We must all stand in front of Christ to be judged. Each one of us will be judged for the good things and the bad things we do while we are in our bodies. Then each of us will receive what we are supposed to get.*^{2Cor.5:1-10} 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... 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.^{1Cor.15:53:57}

These 3 facts about Jesus' Resurrection will change our life when we believe them (accept them and act on them). They will not only change our life's destination by giving us eternal life but they will also change our life's direction.

Our outlook and uplook (attitude) will change because we will live in God's assurance of our future (Biblical hope) and not just in our own self-assurance that all will be well (mental hope). *For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*^{Jn.6:40}

April

God the Creator: *Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.* ^{Is.40:28}

Sunday April 7th 2013 Ps. 36 John 21

What's so special about 153?

Our News headlines are full of statistics and politicians in particular use percentages to try to persuade us of their policies. In fact, statistics are not usually very important simply because they are so easy to “massage” - to manipulate and misinterpret. Actually statistics are another way of lying!

When something dramatic or life-changing happens to us, the circumstances will often remain clear and vivid for the rest of our life. For experienced fishermen to catch nothing all night and then to be told by a “Stranger” to *Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some [fish]* ^{John.21:6} was extraordinary but when *they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish* - that was extra-extraordinary and memorably dramatic! Hence the number 153. It has no “spiritual” significance but the events of that morning on the shore of Galilee including the actual number of fish caught remained imprinted in John’s mind and he could remember it years later when he wrote the Gospel.

The 153 fish were only an introduction to even more dramatic events that would unfold that morning – the restoration of Peter - and they pointed to the abundance of God’s grace. Abundance means “fullest measure”, “plenty”, “lots of” or “enough and plenty to spare”. Peter had denied Jesus 3 times leading up to the Crucifixion just as Jesus had predicted. Peter was remorseful and feeling guilty about letting Jesus down – these are natural emotions but debilitating if not dealt with. Jesus was using the 153 fish to help restore Peter as He had foretold: *Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.* ^{Lk.22:31-32}

As a side issue, when the Disciples gave their offering of cold fish to Jesus, He transformed it by fire - He cooked the fish for breakfast: *When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ...Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.* ^{John.21:9-13}

George Canty wrote: *Bible religion is a fire faith. Fire translates into exuberant generosity, joy, praise and worship, an “I’ve got to, I want to, I must, I will” attitude. Not an occasional bit of service attitude, but one ablaze for God, in giving, praying, working and loving. People sing ‘send the fire’. They mean on the unconverted world, on God’s work, on their church. But why not on themselves? A cold offering is better than no offering at all, I suppose; just doing what we should, attending worship, helping a bit here and there, doing things at and for the church. But when the God of the burning bush, the God of Pentecostal tongues of fire comes, offerings become fire offerings. (Contemporary Issues as seen by George Canty available from our Website under What We Teach/Resources)*

God wants us all to be mature and so Jesus gave *the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* ^{Eph.4:11-13} God does not help us in order that we may just feel good but so that we can “feed” (that is, to strengthen, encourage and support) others as well as to enable us to remain faithful witnesses: *Jesus Christ, who is*

the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.^{Rev 1:5} Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.^{Rev.2:12}

God is a God of Abundance – a God of Plenty. It is recorded 8 times in the OT that God abounds in love: *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.*^{Ps.103:8} (Also Ex.34:6; Nu.14:18; Neh.9:17; Ps.86:5; Ps.86:15; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2) God's abundance is available to *all who find shelter 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.*^{Ps.36:7-9} God's abundance to us is not often in this world's (natural) possessions: *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*^{Lk.12:15} *The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.*^{Ecd.5:12}

God's abundance is in Love,^{Ps.103:8} **Grace and Peace:** *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*^{2Pet.1:2}

Jesus instructed Peter to feed (tend and shepherd) His sheep and to follow Him.^{Jn.21:15-19}

Too often we only focus on honouring God with our lips instead of our lives but we need to do both if we are to become the people God expects us to! *The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.*^{Matt.13:11-13}

Use it or lose it! If the abundance does not overflow into action we will lose what we do have. *As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.*^{Ezek.33:30-32}

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."^{Matt.7:24-27}

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says... But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.^{Jas.1:22-25}

British Christians are too busy singing dreamy individualistic praise songs to stand up for the King of kings in the real world. So evil goes unopposed - except by a few. It is a good job we serve a God of miracles. But will our mighty God look at the church in Britain and conclude that we might as well be given over to wickedness for all the use we are in proclaiming his kingdom on earth?^{Christian Voice}

How can we shepherd Jesus' "sheep" and tend them? The best way is to share what God has done for us: *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*^{2Cor.1:2-4}

So what's so special about 153? Nothing really - other than that was the number of fishes John and the other Disciples caught when Jesus reinstated Peter and instructed him to feed His sheep. **Will you just remember the statistics or will you remember the instructions too?** Let's continue to follow Jesus and feed others in the knowledge that He is the God of Abundance and that He *will supply our every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*^{Phil.4:19}

Sunday 14th April 2013 Ps.103:1-12 Acts 19

Do you know enough about the Kingdom of God to convince others?

Paul spoke out fearlessly, addressing and convincing them about the kingdom of God.^{Acts 19:8}

When Paul introduced the Pentecostal message to the Believers in Ephesus he did not preach about the Holy Spirit, tongues or prophecy but he taught on the Kingdom of God. The Church was birthed at Pentecost and that is when the Kingdom of God began in earnest even though the Old Covenant rituals were practised by some of the New Covenant Believers for the next 40 years. Although the Old Covenant was obsolete from the birth of the Church it was very difficult for some of the Jews to give up their traditions^{Acts 15:5} but when the Temple was destroyed in 70AD the Old Covenant was wound up completely: *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.*^{Heb.8:13}

The Old Covenant Believers are not inferior to us under the New – they just happened to live at a different time and under different rules. They are called a *great cloud of witnesses*,^{Heb.12:1} *who were still living by faith when they died.*^{Heb.11:13} *They were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*^{Heb.11:39-40} Paul taught that there is only *one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*^{Eph.4:4-6} And so it is clear the Old Covenant Believers are part of the Kingdom of God (in heaven) as much as we are part of the Kingdom of God (on earth). We don't have to wait until we die to enter God's Kingdom – if we meet God's criteria we can be part of His Kingdom NOW: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*^{Matt.5:3-10}

Jesus Christ and His Kingdom was Peter's message at the birth of the Church. He preached that Jesus was the legal heir to King David's throne but more importantly, that Jesus' Kingship over the promised Messianic Kingdom had already begun: *David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.*^{Acts 2:29-32}

So what is God's Kingdom?

God's Kingdom is the reign of Christ in individuals – in my life and your life. God's Kingdom is not a geographical country or a physical nation: *Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the kingdom of God come?" Jesus answered, "God's kingdom is coming, but not in a way that you will be able to see with your eyes. People will not say, -Look, here it is!' or, -There it is!' because God's kingdom is within you.*^{Lk.17:20-21(NCV)} Jesus came to do God's will: *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*^{Jn.6:38} He came to live out God's will and not just to teach about it as theology or philosophy: *Therefore, when Christ*

came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me... Then I said, 'Here I am... I have come to do your will, my God.' ...And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."^{Heb.10:7-10} "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."^{Lk.22:42} **God's Kingdom is you and me doing God's will – doing what God wants not just what we want:** This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."^{Matt.6:9-10} Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."^{Matt.7:21} **God's will is that we have eternal life** (by looking to Jesus and believing in Him): For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."^{Jn.6:40} Jesus is our Example and we too must **do** what God wants not just think about it or talk about it: For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."^{1Cor.4:20}

God's Kingdom is a Spiritual Kingdom: 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."^{Jn.18:36NLT} So we must not put too much emphasis on the physical or sensual (what we can connect to with our 5 senses): For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."^{Rom.14:17} And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."^{Lk.12:29-32}

God has qualified us to share in His Kingdom and He will take care of us: 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."^{Col.1:12-13} And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."^{Jn.6:38-40} We must ensure we don't disqualify ourselves from His service: Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."^{Lk.9:60-62}

This world's system is opposed to God's kingdom and so we can expect to have trouble. God does not make His Kingdom hard or troublesome but the trouble comes from the devil and this world's opposition to God: Dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ said before. They said to you, "In the last times there will be people who laugh about God, following their own evil desires which are against God." These are the people who divide you, people whose thoughts are only of this world, who do not have the Spirit. But dear friends, use your most holy faith to build yourselves up, praying in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the Lord Jesus Christ with his mercy to give you life forever."^{Jude 1:17-21NCV} Then they returned... strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said."^{Acts14:212-22} The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him. Then he said to them, "You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honours is detestable in the sight of God. "Until John the Baptist, the law of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of

the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is eager to get in. But that doesn't mean that the law has lost its force. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the smallest point of God's law to be overturned.^{Lk.16:14-17NLT}

Any hardship we endure now for God's Kingdom will be more than compensated for when the Kingdom is completed. *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*^{Rom.8:18} *Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.*^{2Cor.4:16-18NLT}

God's Kingdom is an Everlasting Kingdom. That means it will **never** be interrupted, usurped or replaced: *But here is what he says about the Son. "You are God. Your throne will last for ever and ever. Your kingdom will be ruled by what is right. You have loved what is right and hated what is evil. So your God has placed you above your companions. He has filled you with joy by pouring the sacred oil on your head."*^{Heb.1:8-9} *"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. "The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy."*^{Dan.2:44-45} *Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.*^{Dan.7:27}

So don't be intimidated or lose heart.

God's Kingdom is God's Kingdom – it belongs to Him and has His values (rules)

God's Kingdom is a Spiritual Kingdom – it is within us and cannot be defined by natural boundaries

God's Kingdom is an existing Kingdom – it is right now (not just in the future).

Keep *speaking out fearlessly, addressing and convincing others about the kingdom of God.*^{Acts19:8}

Sunday 21st April 2013 Ps.103:11-2 Acts 20

I've started so I will finish! This cliché comes from the long running TV quiz show *Mastermind* where the host continues to finish his question after the time has run out. The Apostle Paul said: *My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.*^{Acts 20:24}

Being a Christian means becoming a Disciple (follower or pupil) of Jesus Christ: *All those who want to be my disciples must come and follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And if they follow me, the Father will honour them.*^{Jn.12:26} A Disciple's goal is to be like their Master. *The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.*^{Lk.6:40} To be Jesus' Disciple is not 7 minute wonder taken on a whim or a "spur of the moment" decision but is the result of a reasoned and determined commitment to follow Him whatever the cost: *Suppose someone wants to build a tower. Won't he sit down first and figure out how much it will cost? Then he will see whether he has enough money to finish it. Suppose he starts building and is not able to finish. Then everyone who sees what he has done will laugh at him. They will say, 'This fellow started to build. But he wasn't able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. And suppose he has 10,000 men, while the other has 20,000 coming against him. Won't he first sit down and think about whether he can win? And suppose he decides he can't*

win. Then he will send some men to ask how peace can be made. He will do this while the other king is still far away. In the same way, you must give up everything you have. If you don't, you can't be my disciple.^{Lk.14:28-33}

Life's journey is often referred to as a "race". In a race the course is marked out and the competitors must keep to the track, obey the rules and finish the race if they are to win. *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*^{1Cor.9:24-27}

God has set out a course for each of our lives: *You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.*^{Ps.139:15-17} Now it is up to us to keep to the track, obey the rules and finish the race which requires discipline and determination. But life is a long distance "marathon" not a 2 minute sprint so if we do fall we have time to pick ourselves up and carry on. We are not disqualified if we make a mistake so long as we get back on course and finish the course: *Do you see what this means—all these pioneers [mentioned in Heb.11] who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never give up! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honour, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he ploughed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!*^{Heb.12:1-3}

1 Keep to the track: We are to keep a straight course in life based on God's values. *Folly brings joy to one who has no sense, but whoever has understanding keeps a straight course.*^{Pron.15:21} This straight course is Righteousness: *He guides me in tracks of righteousness for his name's sake.*^{Ps.23:3} That means that we are to live our lives by faith. Faith means trusting God i.e. accepting His values and provisions, rather than trying to make it through on our own efforts: *I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law? Or did you receive the Spirit by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? You began with the Holy Spirit. Are you now trying to complete God's work in you by your own strength?*^{Gal.3:2-3}

2 Obey the rules: God's rules are always right - they are best and blest. Under the OT there were literally 100's of rules that were encapsulated by the ten Commandments and summarised by two – **Love your God and Love your Neighbour.** *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'* This is the first and greatest commandment. *And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'* All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.^{Matt.22:37-40}

Jesus introduced a New Command – to love one another (you cannot be a Christian unless you do love God and so to "love God" is not a "law" for us to obey but a requirement of being a Christian): *I give you a new command. Love one another. You must love one another, just as I have loved you. If you love one another, everyone will know you are my disciples.*^{Jn.13:34-35} *Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our*

hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.^{1Jn.3:18-24} This new Law to Love one another is primarily seen in Jesus and will never be out-dated or superseded by a different law: Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.^{1Jn.2:7-8} Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.^{Rom.8:39}

To love is to be like God and should be our goal in life: We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.^{Mother Teresa}

3 Finish the race: An athlete who does not finish the race cannot win.

Jesus finished His work. "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour."^{Jn.4:34-38} Later, knowing that everything had now been finished... Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.^{Jn.19:28-30}

Paul was confident that he had completed his work: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.^{2Tim.4:7-8}

Paul was also confident that God will complete His work in us: I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.^{Phil.1:3-6}

Will you complete your work? Do not be fooled: You cannot cheat God. People harvest only what they plant. If they plant to satisfy their sinful selves, their sinful selves will bring them ruin. But if they plant to please the Spirit, they will receive eternal life from the Spirit. We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of eternal life at the right time if we do not give up. When we have the opportunity to help anyone, we should do it. But we should give special attention to those who are in the family of believers.^{Gal.6:7-10}

See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.^{Col.4:17}

Sunday 28th April 2013 Ps. 104:1-15 Acts 21

How Precise is Prophecy?

Should we always take "prophecy" literally and follow it unquestioningly or should we assess what people say and then act according to our God-given wisdom? Agabus' prophecy *This is what the Holy Spirit says: The Jews in Jerusalem are going to tie up the man who owns this belt just like this and hand him over to godless unbelievers.*^{Acts21:11} was not fulfilled absolutely literally as it was the Romans who bound Paul and not the Jews who handed Paul over to the Romans.^{Acts 22:24}

What is Prophecy?

Prophecy is giving a clear witness to Jesus: *For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*^{Rev.19:10} *(What Jesus taught is the very heart of prophecy.*^{NIV} *for the witness of Jesus is the spirit of the prophet's word.*^{BBE} *For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.*^{NLT}) The purpose of prophecy is to build up the Church by encouraging and comforting other Believers: *But anyone who prophesies speaks to people. He says things to make them stronger, to give them hope and to comfort them. ...But those who prophesy build up the church.*^{1Cor.14:3-4} There are times when God gives people insight into situations like David^{Acts2:30-31} and Agabus^{Acts 11:28;21:10} but mostly significance of prophecy is unknown to the “prophet” as Paul explains: *But suppose unbelievers or visitors come in while everyone is prophesying. Then they will be shown by all who speak that they are sinners. They will be judged by all. The secrets of their hearts will be brought out into the open. They will fall down and worship God. They will exclaim, “God is really here among you!”*^{1Cor.14:24-25}

Are Prophecies as important as Scripture?

Is the spoken word of God the same as the written Word of God? In other words: **should we always obey (act on) a Prophecy?** An important NT principle is that Elders oversee the Church not Prophets. Although God has given the Prophets (along with the Pastors and the Evangelists etc.) to the Church^{Eph.3:11} the Church is governed by Overseers (Elders) *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*^{Acts20:28} “Overseer” in Greek is *episkopos* which comes from a word meaning watchman or guardian “Elder” is *presbuteros* and literally means an old man (i.e. someone with experience). But wisdom doesn’t always come with age: *Elibu ...said: “I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.’ But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.”*^{Job.32:6-9} So Elders/Overseers don’t have to be “old” people but people who are known for their godly wisdom: *Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.*^{1Tim.4:12} *Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.*^{Acts6:3} It is the ability to teach coupled with good character that qualifies an Elder: *Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife... He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*^{1Tim.3:1-7} *An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife...Since an overseer manages God's household, ...He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*^{Titus1:5-9}

Jesus is a perfect combination of Deity and Humanity with nothing lacking. His *words are spirit and life*^{Jn.6:63} but our words are spirit and flesh – a mixture - because we are not yet perfect.^{Phil.3:12} In this life we only partially understand things and even prophecy is incomplete: *For we know in part and we prophesy in part, (reveals only part of the whole picture.)*^{NLT} *We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete.*TM *but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears ...For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*^{1Cor.13:9-12}

Prophecy is God speaking through a human being^{1Thes.2:13} but we are all capable of misrepresenting what God has said. We filter information through our personality and so at best we “interpret” what we receive but also we often only hear part of the total

story. However we do have the written Scriptures to reference everything.^{2Pet.1:16-21;1Tim.3:16}

After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.^{Jn.2:22} And we also have the mind of Christ to help us: *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.*^{1Cor.2:14-16TM} We should always evaluate what people say, including (and probably especially!) in the church: *Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully (evaluate) what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*^{1Cor.14:29-33}

There is a story of a Prophet in 1Kings 13 who was distracted by another Prophet with a "Word from God" and his disobedience cost him his life. In Jeremiah 35 God condemns Israel for ignoring His commands by using the example of the Rechabites' commitment to their family tradition when they were challenged. The Bereans were commended for their diligence in *examining the Scriptures to see if they supported what [was] said.*^{Acts 17:11}

Norah Lam recalls an incident in her childhood:

At dinner he raised his tea cup. "In praise of tea," he said in his gentle voice, "let me quote the words of one of our eighth-century writers: 'If one is aching of the brain, smarting of the eyes, troubled in the four limbs or afflicted in the hundred joints, he may take tea. It's liquor is like the sweetest dew of Heaven'"

He smiled at me. "Did you know, Neng Yee, the finest tea in China is grown right here in Sichuan?"

I felt encouraged to ask him about the white headbands I saw men wearing earlier in the day. He laughed. "Let me tell you. Thousands of years ago a certain scholar recommended that men wear such bands to ward off headaches. And without questioning, or thinking about it, they continue to do so today." He looked at me closely. "Now, tell me, my child, what does that teach you?"

I was too bashful to reply at first, but then answered: "Just because someone tells you something is so, doesn't make it right." Grandfather smiled and turned to my parents. "A perceptive child, and one with good judgment." Turning back to me he said, "Yes, my granddaughter, never forget that. Don't believe everything you're told. Always think for yourself." He laughed and turned to the rest of the family at table. "After all, I didn't get to be bank chairman by letting others think for me."

I was to remember Grandfather's advice in later years at a time when there was no laughter at all. And, in a sense, it would save my soul.

From China Cry – the Nora Lam story

Margaret Thatcher was quoted at her funeral: "We often went to church twice on a Sunday, as well as on other occasions during the week. We were taught there always to make up our own minds and never take the easy way of following the crowd."

How do we encourage Prophecy?

Prophecy as Forth-telling is for every Believer. We should focus on Jesus and His Kingdom and be ready to share our faith, expecting God to use us. But make sure in your hearts that Christ is Lord. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope

you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect.^{1Pet.3:15} *Proclaim the Message with intensity; keep on your watch. Challenge, warn, and urge your people. Don't ever give up. Just keep it simple.*^{2Tim.4:2} *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. (that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*^{NKJV}*)*^{Philemon1:6}

There is also the Gift of Forth-telling (public preaching and teaching) which is for some - it is a calling and so it is not for everyone.

Prophecy as Fore-telling is also for everyone because God can use anyone to speak to others. **Again, focus on Jesus and His Kingdom.**

There is also the Gift of the Prophet. This is a calling and so is for the some (like Agabus in the NT) not for all.

God always gives us opportunities and as we use them He gives us more opportunities (c.f. Stephen in Acts 6)

So will you say things to make [others] stronger, to give them hope and to comfort them?^{1Cor.14:4}

Start today and make it a life-long habit.

Don't worry about "*did God say this?*" but **get immersed in God's Word** (Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures) **and trust God's leading by the Holy Spirit within you.**

His ministry is to remind us of what God has said: *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*^{Jn.14:26}

Although we are imperfect we can still communicate God's Word (Jesus) by our words. And we should always check what others say with Scriptures (filtered through the death and resurrection of Jesus) before acting.

May

God the Sustainer: *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word.* ^{Heb.1:3}

Sunday 3th May Ps.105:1-11

Are You Famous Yet?

History is usually a record of famous people who are credited with influencing society or world events. *Famous* means *celebrated, illustrious, popular, notable, well-known, important*. At school we learnt about many of these prominent people – Kings, Queens, Inventors, Benefactors, etc. But we rarely learn about “ordinary” people – people like you and me - who have not been noticed by the world's media or achieved anything (yet!) so spectacular that it changed the course of history. Yet every one of us is unique and important and we are different from the rest of Creation. Because we were created in God's image, we have an eternal spirit that will survive our physical death to rise either to eternal life, or to eternal punishment. *Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.* ^{Matt.25:46} *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.* ^{Jn.3:36}

After having peace with God, the greatest accomplishment for any of us, is to introduce someone else to Jesus Christ. *Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”* ^{Jn.1:45} This is more important and has greater consequences than any invention throughout the world's history, regardless of how much money it made or how many people applauded the inventor. The value of a human life is beyond price: *No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them - the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough* ^{Ps.49:7-8} To play a part in saving a person from an eternal hell is not only possible but is what God expects from us. *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.* ^{Jas.5:19-20}

We are all commissioned to witness (give testimony) to Jesus. *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.* ^{Acts1:8} **To witness is to actively share what we**

believe about Jesus: *I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith.* ^{Philemon1:4-6} The NKJV translates this verse slightly differently by emphasising that our testimony becomes effective when we acknowledge all the good things of Jesus that are in us: *that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*

Salvation comes from faith

in Jesus: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God* ^{Eph.2:8} **and faith comes from hearing about Jesus:** *The same Lord is Lord of all. He richly blesses everyone who calls on him. Scripture says, “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? ...So faith comes from hearing the message. And the message that is heard is the word of Christ.* ^{Rom.10:12-17}

If we sow the good seed of God's Word (who is Jesus) then God will watch over it and that seed will produce a harvest: *Jesus also said, “Here is what God's kingdom is like. A farmer scatters seed on the ground. Night and day the seed comes up and grows. It happens whether the farmer sleeps or gets up. He doesn't know how it happens. All by itself the soil produces grain. First the stalk*

comes up. Then the head appears. Finally, the full grain appears in the head. Before long the grain ripens. So the farmer cuts it down, because the harvest is ready.^{Mk.4:26-29} This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.^{Lk.8:11} The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."^{Jer.1:12} Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.^{Gal.6:7-9}

Our love for God is evidence that He knows us: But whoever loves God is known by God.^{1Cor.8:3} **God even keeps a record of our conversations:** Those who had respect for the LORD talked with one another. They cheered each other up. And the LORD heard them. A list of people and what they did was written on a scroll in front of him. It included the names of those who respected the LORD and honoured him. "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."^{Mal.3:16-18} Paul was confident that God would bestow on all of us a crown of righteousness if we keep the faith and finish the race: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.^{2Tim.4:7-8} **Not all God's promises are for the future:** For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.^{2Cor.1:20-22} **We can wear a crown of blessings now!** Blessings crown the head of the righteous.^{Psm.4:10} **But our greatest claim to fame will be having 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!^{Matt.25:21}

God can and will use our testimony to produce the miracle of new birth in others. We can never know what God has planned for the person we talk to: In the 1800's there was a Boston teacher named Edward Kimball who shared his faith in Jesus with a shoe salesman, who eventually gave his life to Christ. The young shoe salesman was Dwight Lyman Moody. In later years as an evangelist, DL Moody had a great influence for Christ on multitudes of lives, but one in particular - FB Meyer who became a renowned speaker and author. Meyer preached the Gospel on college campuses across the USA and brought J. Wilbur Chapman to a faith in Jesus. Chapman, became a leader in the YMCA movement across the States. He brought the great baseball legend, turned preacher, Billy Sunday to North Carolina for a series of Gospel revival meetings in a town called Charlotte. The community leaders were so enthusiastic about the success of the meetings, they decided to have another outreach event, this time led by Mordecai Ham. In response to one of Ham's invitations to receive Christ, a teenager from a dairy farm made his decision to follow Jesus. That teenager's name was Billy Graham.^{From "Are You Famous Yet" available from our website}

When you share your faith in Jesus with people, you never know what God is going to do with their lives. You may just be leading a future world reformer to Christ, who in turn will bring multitudes to Jesus. You'll have a huge investment in that. Notwithstanding when you lead even one precious life to the Lord you rescue a soul from a lost eternity. Few of us are gifted to preach to thousands at meetings, but we can all speak about our Saviour to family, friends and colleagues, especially when we realize they have needs and we reach out to help and care in those needs.

By sharing our faith we can play a part in another person's salvation.

That surely makes us "famous" and "important"!

Sunday 12th May 2013 Ps. 87 Acts 22

Where were you born? *I was born a citizen.* ^{Acts 22:28}

A person's place of birth (POB) is often used in legal documents for identification and automatically determines the nationality of the baby. This is also true of our spiritual identification – we need to be born again – from above – if we are to claim to be citizens of God's Kingdom: *Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."* ^{Jn.3:3} *Some people did accept him. They believed in his name. He gave them the right to become children of God. To be a child of God has nothing to do with human parents. Children of God are not born because of human choice or because a husband wants them to be born. They are born because of what God does.* ^{Jn.1:12-13} Although the Gospel story is "old" – 2000 years old now – it will never be "old fashioned". The facts are immutable (irreversible) – *you must be born again!* This was referred to in our Psalm today: *Word's getting around; they point them out: "This one was born again here!" The word's getting out on Zion: "Men and women, right and left, get born again in her!" GOD registers their names in his book: "This one, this one, and this one - born again, right here."* ^{Ps.8:4-6}

The Bible refers to two "Zions" or "Jeruselems" – one in the Middle East: *the great city—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified* ^{Rev.11:8} **and one in heaven:** *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."* *He who was sitting on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down. You can trust these words. They are true."* ^{Rev.21:2-5} **The 1st Jerusalem stands for the Law** or Old Covenant and is represented by Hagar and the **2nd Jerusalem stands for Freedom** or the New Covenant and is represented by Sarah: *It is written that Abraham had two sons. The slave woman gave birth to one of them. The free woman gave birth to the other one. Abraham's son by the slave woman was born in the usual way. But his son by the free woman was born because of God's promise. 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... Brothers and sisters, you are children because of God's promise just as Isaac was. At that time, the son born in the usual way tried to hurt the son born by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the same now. But what does Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman. Get rid of her son. The slave woman's son will never have a share of the family's property with the free woman's son."* *Brothers and sisters, we are not the slave woman's children. We are the free woman's children.* ^{Gal.4:21-31}

When we are born again we are not just "adopted" into God's family by a change of name but by a change of heart or spirit as well: *[Jesus] came to set free those who were under the law. He wanted us to be adopted as children with all the rights children have. Because you are his children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. He is the Holy Spirit. By his power we call God "Abba."* *Abba means Father.* ^{Gal.4:5-6} *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.* ^{Ezek.36:26-27;11:19;18:31}

When Jesus breathed on His Disciples, He was re-creating them in a similar way to God when He created Adam ('Breath' and 'Spiri' is the same word in both Hebrew and

Greek): Again Jesus said, "May peace be with you! The Father has sent me. So now I am sending you." He then breathed on them. He said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'.^{Jn.20:21-22} Then the LORD God formed a man. He made him out of the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into him. And the man became a living person (soul).^{Gen.2:7} It is the Holy Spirit that gives us New Birth: But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised when I say, 'You must all be born again.'^{Jn.3:6-7} This new birth makes us a new creation: Anyone who believes in Christ is a new creation. The old is gone! The new has come! It is all from God. He brought us back to himself through Christ's death on the cross. And he has given us the task of bringing others back to him through Christ.^{2Cor.5:17-18}

As Citizens of Heaven we are in a new order where we have direct personal access to God: Through Christ we both come to the Father by the power of one Holy Spirit. So you are no longer strangers and outsiders. You are citizens together with God's people. You are members of God's family.^{Eph.2:18-19} Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary... The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered... [were] external regulations applying until the time of the new order.^{Heb.9:1-10}

If we live as Citizens of heaven we will find it difficult to revert back to our old way of thinking. Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honour at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory... But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.^{Col.3:1-10} By renewing our minds, we keep our thoughts focused on God and good things. 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. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.^{Rom.12:1-2} Always think about what is true. Think about what is noble, right and pure. Think about what is lovely and worthy of respect. If anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about those kinds of things.^{Phil.4:8}

We are now much more than "mere men"^{Ps.82:7; 1Cor.3:1-3} — **we are Born Again Believers who sing about our heavenly blessings:** As they make music they will sing, "Zion, all of our blessings come from you."^{Ps.87:7}

Whilst faith is a gift,^{Rom.12:3} we are responsible for cultivating our faith: *I prayed for faith, and thought that someday faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, "Now faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." I had closed my Bible and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study—and faith has been growing ever since.*^{D.L.Moody}

Let us continue to live like our spiritual ancestors who were living by faith to the end of their life: All those people were still living by faith when they died. They didn't receive the things God had promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a long way off. They openly said that they were outsiders and strangers on earth. People who say things like that show that they are looking for a country of their own. What if they had been thinking of the country they had left? Then they could have returned to it. Instead, they longed for a better country. They wanted one in heaven. So God is pleased when they call him their God. In fact, he has prepared a city for them.^{Heb.11:13-16}

Sunday 19th May 2013 Ps. 105:1-10

No Sermon was preached because God was ministering to everyone!

Sunday 26th May 2013 Ps. 106:1-5 Acts 23

Christianity Clears the Conscience! (from last week)

"Friends, I've lived with a clear conscience before God all my life, up to this very moment." ^{Acts 23:1}

A bad conscience brings guilt which is debilitating and dangerous. It stops people from sleeping and can drive them to despair. They do all sorts of strange things to soothe their conscience but usually the guilt re-appears. Sometimes people manage to blot out parts of their past through denial or distraction such as self-harm, hurting others, eating disorders etc. Some turn to religion and seek solace in ascetics or rituals but unless the real cause is addressed these activities only cover up the problem.

The real cause of a bad conscience is not behaviour but a broken relationship with God. Mankind was created in God's image and when Adam and Eve sinned, they died spiritually (their spirits were separated from God's Spirit). The spiritual peace and harmony (peace with God) with which they were created was gone, but the desire for that harmony was still there. Since then everyone, however dysfunctional or distant from God, still has an inner yearning to find that peace, but they are incapable of achieving it until they are united with God. *But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."* ^{Is. 57:20-21} Augustine (of Hippo) said *"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."*

Guilt is a heartache of the conscience resulting from a conscious or subconscious awareness of God's holiness and a yearning for oneness or unity with God (as our first father Adam originally had). All our efforts to appease this "*spirit-ache*" only has a temporary effect and is ultimately futile because our spirit is beyond repair - we need a new spirit. ^{Ezek. 11:19} The Greek word translated "*conscience*" comes from 2 words *knowledge* and *with* (i.e. *co-knowledge with oneself*) and is the part of us that God designed to govern our lives: *For merely listening to the law doesn't make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight. Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.* ^{Rom. 2:13-16}

Paul is a prime example of someone who was able to deal with his conscience. He was a driven fanatic and today he would be called a fundamentalist bigot. He stopped at nothing to defend his sincerely held beliefs including breaking every internal law of God and most of the external laws too – and all in the name of religion. He thought he was defending God by persecuting Christians to prison and death. ^{Acts 22:4,19} When Paul realised what he had done was offensive to God as well as to humanity, he was a broken man and grief stricken but was told to *wash [his] sins away, [by] calling on [Jesus] name.* ^{Acts 22:16} Later Paul stated that he had *lived with a clear conscience before God all [his] life* ^{Acts 23:1} and that he *served God with a clear conscience.* ^{2Tim. 1:3}

Often our greatest struggle is dealing with our conscience – **we know God has forgiven our sins but we can still remember them!** We need to deal with our conscience – after all Christianity is about peace with God through Jesus Christ! ^{2Cor. 1:2} *Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth. And by this we will know*

that we are of the truth and will convince our conscience in his presence, that if our conscience condemns us, that God is greater than our conscience and knows all things. Dear friends, if our conscience does not condemn us, we have confidence in the presence of God.^{1Jn.3:18-21} Other translations put it this way: let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love. This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality. It's also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves.TM When our hearts make us feel guilty, we can still have peace before God.^{NCV} And by this we will know that we are of the truth and will convince our conscience in his presence.^{NET}

This peace with God was something the OT promised but was unable to deliver because it only comes through Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.^{2Pet.1:2}

The rituals of religion can appease the conscience for a little while but brings no permanent relief because they only deal with external matters not our internal conscience: Here is what the Holy Spirit was showing us ...that the gifts and sacrifices they offered were not enough. They were not able to remove the worshiper's feelings of guilt. They deal only with food and drink and different kinds of special washings. They are rules that deal with things outside our bodies. People had to obey them only until the new covenant came.^{Heb.9:8-10}

Faith is the basis of our relationship with God but this faith has to be worked out in action or it is just an empty word: My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people claim they have faith but don't act like it? Can that kind of faith save them? ...If [faith] doesn't cause us to do something, it's dead... I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that. And they tremble! ...The body without the spirit is dead. In the same way, faith without good works is dead.^{Jas.2:14-26} We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honourably in every way.^{Heb.13:18}

Some people have no conscience left and think they are “alright” when they are not! To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.^{Tit.1:15-16} The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.^{1Tim.4:1-5}

So a “clear” conscience doesn’t make us right with God – it is God’s judgement (or pronouncement) that makes us right: My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.^{1Cor.4:4}

The Baptism of Believers is part of God’s provision to clear our conscience: The water of the flood is a picture of the baptism that now saves you also. The baptism I'm talking about has nothing to do with removing dirt from your body. Instead, it promises God that you will keep a clear sense of what is right and wrong (pledge of a clear conscience toward God).^{1Pet.3:21}

The basis of a true Clear Conscience is God’s pronouncement of forgiveness of our sins In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.^{Eph.1:7-8}

Let us keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.^{1Tim.3:9}

God responds to faith but answers prayer!

Last week we prayed that our Members of Parliament would stand up for rightness and goodness as they debated and voted on the same-sex Marriage Bill. The Bill went forward as expected with a large majority of 366 to 161 with 133 Conservative MPs (including 2 Cabinet and 10 Junior Ministers) voting against this immoral Government Bill!

Charlie Elphicke, our local MP, replied to me this week stating:

Thank you for your email. Given that jobs, money and the cost of living are the things that matter most to be, I was dismayed that so much time was spent on the marriage bill this week. With the bill having now been voted on, I want to underline that I believe we already had a great settlement that did not need changing.

Civil partnerships have been effective in providing public recognition and tax benefits for same sex couples. Traditional marriage has worked well since we moved out of caves and started living in houses. Indeed probably long before that. It's worked so well that every culture and religion includes the concept of marriage. Why is that? In part I think it is because it's a basic building block of stability in our communities. In part because children take a very long time to grow up and you need a framework of stability built around them to give them the best chance in life. The idea of a stable environment for kids is not something lately dreamt up by our courts and social services. It's deeply embedded in every culture around the globe and has been well understood for millennia.

So if it works, why change it? Those in favour of the changes point to the polls. The polls indeed say it's got public support. Kind of. My take is that what we are seeing is about 50% of the population don't care very much and are relaxed about changing things. Around 10% are metropolitan liberal types enthusiastic for change. Meanwhile 40% are dead against changing marriage – and passionately so. For me I have opposed changing things all along. In part this is because I think you can only change things at the pace society is ready for it. In part because I am a person of faith and see marriage as a religious rite. Most MPs who believe in God keep quiet about it as it is seen as a bit quaint these days. But as you probably know by now I am not afraid to tell it how I see it

So I opposed the changes to marriage because I think the current system works well. I believe that people of faith should be respected. Moreover I am passionate about free speech. So I supported measures to protect freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. I opposed civil partnerships for all as I believe it will undermine marriage as a concept that lies deeply at the heart of society.

I am very sorry that the protections for freedom of speech and freedom of conscience were rejected and that marriage is now set to be changed. I did all I could to oppose these things at every turn.

Best wishes

Charlie Elphicke MP

God responds to faith but answers prayer!

We should remember that no prayers of faith to our God are ever wasted!

God hears our prayers: *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*^{1Jn.5:14-15}

After we have prayed, we should have the humility to trust God with the outcome: *Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*^{Gen.18:25}

God can do anything: *Then a message came to me from the LORD. He said, "I am the LORD. I am the God of all people. Is anything too hard for me?"*^{Jer.32:26-27} **But He is not obliged to implement our every whim or notion.**

We are still responsible for our actions and must choose to do right: *So have respect for the LORD. Serve him. Be completely faithful to him... But suppose you don't want to serve him. Then choose for yourselves right now whom you will serve.*^{Josh.24:14-15}

The end is not yet. The Bill still has to be passed in the House of Lords where it may well be amended out of all recognition or even thrown out. Our society is being pressurized to accept everything except the good and pure. But there is a day when God will call everyone to account: *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.*^{Matt.12:36-37} *How terrible it will be for those who say that what is evil is good! How terrible for those who say that what is good is evil! How terrible for those who say that darkness is light and light is darkness!*^{Lk.5:20}

Last Sunday was a special day as God responded to our faith (our confident trust and hope in Him) and ministered to each of us individually. Our prayers were heard and God blessed us for them – in fact He made a record of them: *Then those who honoured the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened and heard them. The names of those who honoured the LORD and respected him were written in his presence in a book to be remembered. The LORD All-Powerful says, "They belong to me; on that day they will be my very own. As a parent shows mercy to his child who serves him, I will show mercy to my people. You will again see the difference between good and evil people, between those who serve God and those who don't."*^{Mal.3:16-18}

God did something with us last Sunday that will impact us forever. We should remember that as a special time, but faith is not feeling – faith is our trust in God regardless of our emotions. **True faith is never disappointed**, irrespective of the outcome **because faith is faith in God, not in what He does.**

*What God's doing in me is for eternity
It's not just for today or even tomorrow for they shall pass away
What God's doing in me, making of me is for eternity
So many miracles You've done, You've done for me*

*Let us cherish the moments that are quickly fleeting away
Let us cherish the moments that will soon be known as yesterday
Love is eternal, no beginning and no ending, love is eternal
Let us cherish the moments, the precious, precious moments,
not a future moment, nor a moment of the past but the eternal now.*^{Ruth Heflin}

June

God the Provider: *He provided redemption for His people; He ordained His covenant forever — holy and awesome is His Name.* ^{Ps.111:9}

Sunday 2nd June 2013 Ps.107:1-9

What makes us different from animals?

Our soul is the part of us that includes our personality and character – the living, thinking and emotional part of us that cannot be reduced to mere physics or chemistry. When God created Adam, He breathed the breath of life into him: *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* ^{Gen.2:7} In this respect we are like animals, as they too have the *breath of life* with individual personality and character (a soul): *Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark.* ^{Gen.7:15}

But it is our spirit is that makes us different from animals! Our spirit is the part of us that was made in God's image and it now has a conscience – knowing good from evil. When Adam sinned, he died spiritually (his spirit was separated from God). He lost his innocence and had to choose between right and wrong for every decision each day. *The tree that gives the ability to tell the difference between good and evil was also there... But you must not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you can be sure that you will die.* *...And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil."* ^{Gen.2:9-17;3:22} The word translated "*evil*" is also translated: *distress, misery, injury, calamity, adversity, disaster, harm, hurt, ruin, trouble, unpleasant, wickedness.* When Adam began to know these troubles first-hand and made further wrong choices, it was just the start! Ever since then mankind has regularly chosen *distress, misery, injury, trouble* etc.

Animals have no conscience (they are not aware of good and evil) as they have no eternal spirit and are not responsible for looking after Creation. Man however does have responsibilities: *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."* ^{Gen.1:28} Ruler-ship involves responsibility as this version very eloquently explains: *God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."* ^{Gen.1:26} Animals have no moral parameters and no responsibility for others. They live in a "dog-eat-dog" environment where, literally, the rule of the jungle prevails. There is no wrong for them – their behaviour is just natural!

(A natural consequence of the theory of evolution is that if people are taught they come from animals they soon start living like animals!) However there are lessons that we can learn from animals: *You people who don't want to work, think about the ant! Consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander. It has no leader or ruler. But it stores up its food in summer. It gathers its food at harvest time.* ^{Prov.6:6-8} Animals sometimes protect their own group at the expense of individuals but their own self-preservation is paramount. Humans are different because each person is made in God's image and has a life that is beyond value: *No man can pay for the life of anyone else. No one can give God what that would cost. The price for a life is very high. No payment is ever enough.* ^{Ps.49:7-8} *Love each other, just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than the one who gives his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.* ^{Jn.15:12-14}

The danger of Socialism is that Society becomes more important than the individual and then people no longer matter: *Freedom is individual; there is no such thing as 'collective freedom'... 'collective rights' are [not] more important than the rights of the individual citizen. It is high time we exposed these fallacies.... The Socialist concept that rights belong 'collectively' to groups, and not to individuals, is extremely dangerous. It implies that some men, those in groups, are entitled to such rights, while others are not. If this sounds rather theoretical let me remind you how it can work out in practice. The most conspicuous example is the Soviet Union. There, more than anywhere else, the collectivist dogma has — in the name of 'the people' — made the state the owner and manager of all the means of production, distribution and exchange. All rights in Russia are 'collective rights'; all justice is 'social justice'; all assets are 'public assets'; even morality is judged by reference to 'Socialist ethics', 'state crimes', 'Marxist-Leninist principles'. And the result? What began as a collectivist ideal degenerated swiftly into tyranny. 'Land and freedom' is what the peasants were promised. Lenin and Stalin is what they got. The dream of a people's state abolishing poverty, establishing peace, promoting the brotherhood of man, turned into a nightmare.*^{M.Thatcher (Australia 1976)}

The Moral Compass of the Conscience. Even though we were born separated from God we were not left to our own devices because we have a mind and a conscience and God expects us to apply common-sense to life's choices: *For I am your servant therefore give me the common-sense to apply your rules to everything I do.*^{Ps.119:125TLB} But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.^{Heb.5:14} God has also given us the Holy Spirit as a Counsellor to lead and guide us with godly wisdom: *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth... But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*^{Jn.14:16-26} Wisdom is applied knowledge and both wisdom and knowledge are essential to live a full and contented life: *Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honour you.*^{Pron.4:5-8} But Wisdom is personified in Jesus: *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*^{1Cor.1:30} This means that Jesus is our Source of all the solutions to life's needs and difficulties. *How precious is your loyal love, O God! The human race finds shelter under your wings. They are filled with food from your house, and you allow them to drink from the river of your delicacies. For you are the one who gives and sustains life.*^{Ps.36:7-9}

Every human being (regardless of whether they know God or not) has a conscience that can prick them and prompt them to do right: *If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*^{Gen.4:7} Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.^{Rom.2:13-15} *I heard a voice speak to me in the Aramaic language. 'Saul! Saul!' it said. 'Why are you opposing me? It is hard for you to go against what you know is right.'*^{Acts 26:14}

Obedience for us is not automatic but a choice we make — even Jesus had to learn obedience: *Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered.*^{Heb.5:8} We should make every effort to obey God's principles: *Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.*^{Lk.13:24} 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.^{2Pet.1:5-9}

We should also be careful to learn about God accurately and not just rely on tradition or popular ideas: *they took [Apollos] aside and explained the way of God even more accurately.*^{Acts 18:26}

Songs are very influential and if we sing poor theology (what we believe about God), we end up believing poor theology and then start living poor theology. For example: *We need to hear from you, we need a word from you, if we don't hear from you, what will we do. Wanting you more each day, show us your perfect way, there is no other way, that we can live.* This song sounds religious and appears to convey a dependency on God but actually denies the purpose of Scripture and the ministry of the Holy Spirit who resides in every Believer to guide, counsel and direct. **We have already been given a Word from God and His Name is Jesus:** *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.*^{Heb.1:1-2} *The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away.*^{Is.50:4-5}

Today God speaks to us clearly and distinctly through the Living Word (Jesus) and the Written Word (Scripture) as well as through our Conscience (made more sensitive by the Holy Spirit). Let's make sure that we keep our human distinctive of a conscience distinct as we live a life that honours God!

Sunday 9th June 2013 Ps.108 Acts 24

I believe in the resurrection of the dead.^{Acts 23:6}

The Bible is a story of reality and presents a description of the world as it actually is – about what is most important to human existence, why we have problems and their solutions. Biblical Christianity can be précised by these 5 words: **God; Man; Jesus; Cross; Resurrection.** Each one summarises an essential tenet and leads on to the next.

1 God: God is the Beginning and the Centre of the world – He is good but He is also holy: *[God] said, "I am the LORD, the LORD. I am a God who is tender and kind. I am gracious. I am slow to get angry. I am faithful and full of love. I continue to show my love to thousands of people. I forgive those who do evil. I forgive those who refuse to obey. And I forgive those who sin. But I do not let guilty people go without punishing them.*^{Ex.34:6-7}

2 Man: God created man who rebelled and is now under judgement. Man is separated from God but is able to be united with Him: *It is written, "No one is right with God, no one at all. No one understands. No one trusts in God. All of them have turned away. They have all become worthless. No one does anything good, no one at all."*^{Rom.3:10-12} *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.*^{Rom.8:9-11}

3 Jesus: Jesus released God's rescue plan by becoming human: *The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the one and only Son. He came from the Father. And he was full of grace and truth.*^{Jn.1:14}

4 Cross: It was at the Cross that the great transaction took place - God's Justice was traded for God's Mercy as Jesus paid the price for man's rebellion: *God was pleased to have his whole nature living in Christ. God was pleased to bring all things back to himself because of what Christ has done. That includes all things on earth and in heaven. God made peace through Christ's blood, through his death on the cross.* ^{Col.1:19-20}

5 Resurrection: At the final resurrection God will administer, either His perfect Justice for all our crimes, or His perfect Mercy for all our crimes - and God misses nothing! This future event is as certain as our birth but is the most ignored and disregarded fact of life: *In the past, God didn't judge people for what they didn't know. But now he commands all people everywhere to turn away from their sins. He has set a day when he will judge the world fairly. He has appointed a man to be its judge. God has proved this to all people by raising that man from the dead.* ^{Acts 17:30-31}

I believe in the resurrection of the dead. ^{Acts 23:6} This simple statement was enough to cause a riot in the Jewish parliament. This was not surprising as a few years previously they had insisted on Jesus' execution and so were afraid that they would have to answer to Jesus in person if they accepted His resurrection! (Like most people, they ignored their responsibilities to God because as Spirit He is unseen!)

Christianity's beliefs are unique among all other religions as Jesus Christ is the only Person who claims to be truly God yet truly human: *true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.* ^{Nicene Creed} Some religions have "demi-gods" who are "part-god" and "part-human", others have "gods" who remain distant, or "gods" who appear as human yet behave immorally, other religions have "prophets" who speak on behalf of their "god" but Jesus is both God and Human in One Person and proved that His claims were true by rising from the dead, just as He had said He would. Most religions believe in some sort of life after death or a reincarnation. (The Buddhist's teaching on reincarnation holds that after biological death, the soul or spirit begins a new life in a new body that may be human, animal or spiritual depending on the moral quality of the previous life's actions.) But it is only Christianity offers any proof of life after death. This is based on Jesus' Resurrection which is a forerunner of the future Resurrection when God will judge the Righteous and the unrighteous: *each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.* ^{Heb.9:27} Whilst Judgement is also a tenet of other religions, none have the certainty of meeting their "god's" requirements and so death is faced with insecurity and fear of the future. But Christianity provides a clear and certain prospect after death. *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. We are witnesses of everything he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by nailing him to a cross. But on the third day God raised him from the dead. God allowed Jesus to be seen. But he wasn't seen by all the people. He was seen only by us. We are witnesses whom God had already chosen. We ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people. He told us to give witness that he is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. All the prophets give witness about him. They say that all who believe in him have their sins forgiven through his name.* ^{Acts 10:39-43}

Death is the cut-off point from which there is no return and no second chance. The judgement that follows is final and we will have to live in the consequences of God's verdict for all eternity, either with God or without God. A sinner is someone who is spiritually dead (i.e. whose spirit is "dead" or separated from God). This is a direct result of Adam's disobedience and all his offspring have been born with a faulty spiritual "gene"

that prevents them from fellowshiping with God. To be a Christian, one has to plead guilty (before dying) to being a sinner and living a sinful life, accept God's Judgement that we deserved to die: *The one who sins is the one who will die*^{Ezek.18:20} **BUT also accept that God has transferred our punishment to His Son Jesus Christ:** *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.*^{Is.53:4-5} This transfer of our guilt onto Jesus actually happened when Jesus died at Calvary. *Christ didn't have any sin. But God made him become sin for us. So we can be made right with God because of what Christ has done for us.*^{2Cor.5:21} The act of faith (of believing that **Jesus paid our penalty in full**) guarantees a certain future with God and is described in words like: *comfort*^{Lk.16:25}, *far better*^{Phil.1:23}, *spiritual, power, glory*^{1Cor.15:42-44}, *immortal, imperishable, victory*^{1Cor.15:53-57}. Contrast that with the words used to describe the future without God: *cursed & eternal fire*^{Matt.25:41}, *eternal punishment*^{Matt.25:46}, *burning sulphur & torment*^{Rev.20:10}, *lake of fire & 2nd death*^{Rev.20:14}, *blackest darkness*^{2Pet.2:17}. There is all the difference in the world between **believing about God** and **believing in God**. **To believe about God** is to acknowledge the facts – and even devils to that: *You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that. And they tremble!*^{1as.2:19} **To believe in God** is to place your trust and confidence in God based on **His Character** (how He has behaved in the past) and **His Word** (what He has recorded about Himself). The Word, ultimately, is Jesus (the Living Word who revealed God to us), but the Word is also the Scriptures (the written Word which is God's record of His plan of Redemption revealed in Jesus). *"The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."* ...*He richly blesses everyone who calls on him. Scripture says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*^{Rom.10:11-12} So there is also a vast difference between **believing about the resurrection** and **believing in the resurrection!** As we affirm our belief **in the resurrection** we are confident that the resurrection Jesus experienced 2000 years ago is sufficient evidence for us to be sure of our resurrection unto eternal life: *But Christ really has been raised from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise. Death came because of what a man did. Rising from the dead also comes because of what a man did. Because of Adam, all people die. So because of Christ, all will be made alive. But here is the order of events. 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.*^{1Cor.15:20-24}

Sunday 16th June 2013 Ps.110 Acts 25

Lists: *Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come.*^{Acts 24:}

Perhaps these were his favourite subjects but in any case Paul considered them important enough to talk at length with Felix and Druscilla (who was Agrippa's & Bernice's^{Acts 25:13} sister and Herod the Great's great-grand-daughter). Paul was a very methodical and orderly person who loved lists. Paul's lists are not exclusive - there are many more items that could be added - which explains why similar lists are not identical. He lists the fruit of the Spirit;^{Gal.5:22-23; Col.3:12} spiritual gifts;^{Eph.4; Rom.12; 1Cor.12} qualifications for Elders and Deacons.^{1Tim.3; Tit.1} Paul also lists acts of the flesh.^{1Cor.6:9-10; Gal.5:19-21} (N.B. Although there are some overlapping of the definitions of spirit, soul and flesh, it is generally accepted that we are a spirit, we have a soul and we live in a body. Our spirit is our God-conscious part and our soul is our personality (including emotions).^{1Thes.5:23} *Flesh*

sometimes refers to the body but mostly to the natural or temporal (non-eternal) life and its influence - our appetite, pastimes, work commitment, natural responsibilities etc. The NIV translates “*flesh*” as “*sinful nature*”^{Rom.7:5;7:18;8:8-9;13:14} and although *flesh* is not necessarily evil, it becomes sin if we gratify our natural desires - *flesh* – outside of God’s set parameters.)

Organised lists are easier to memorise than random labels and last week we looked at a list of 5 main points of Christianity: **God; Man; Jesus; Cross; Resurrection**. Here is another list of basic subjects that all Christians should be familiar with: *Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death (useless rituals), and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, (washings or baptisms), the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.*^{Heb.6:1-3}

True religion is spiritual not superstitious and when God intervenes there is often no natural explanation because God is Spirit (which cannot be understood by our senses).

1 Repentance from useless rituals: Useless rituals (*salvation by self-helpTM*) are activities that are done to gain credit with God but have no spiritual value - actually they are detrimental to our faith because they deny the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The early Church had to contend with Judaism - the Old Covenant rituals which were only “shadows” until the Messiah came: *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... The people of the world believe certain basic things. You died with Christ as far as things like that are concerned. So why do you act as if you still belong to the world? Here are the rules you follow. “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” Rules like that are all going to die out as time goes by. They are only based on human rules and teachings. It is true that those rules seem wise. Because of them, people give themselves over to their own kind of worship. They pretend they aren't proud. They treat their bodies very badly. But rules like that don't help. They don't stop people from chasing after sinful pleasures. 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.*^{Col.2:16-3:2}

Whenever we promote the idea that things or routines have spiritual power over, or with, God or the enemy, we have become superstitious. We can make seemingly good things like faith, prayer, fasting, giving, or even worship into a superstitious act - because we believe that if we do these things God must do something for us. In other words, the working of miracles is achievable by works of the flesh as Paul said in Galatians: *Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith.*^{Gal.3:5}

It is natural to want to do something to please God – to earn our salvation or gain some credit with God – but we must learn to deal with our conscience by remembering that Jesus “*paid it all*” and we are saved by **GRACE**: *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, [or from useless rituals] so that we may serve the living God.*^{Heb.9:14}

2 Faith in God: We must take God seriously enough to trust Him and do what He says. If our faith is genuine it will show in our conversations, attitudes and actions. Abel was accepted because he trusted God and did what He said, whereas Cain rejected God’s advice and refused to control his flesh (his natural reaction to his brother): *By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke*

well of his offerings.^{Heb.11:4} The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected. “Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”^{Gen.4:4-7}

Faith is submission to God not commanding God to act. We have turned faith into superstition when we think that, if we can only have faith in God then God must act. The Scriptures declare that even our faith is a gift from God. *For by grace are you saved through faith- it is not of yourselves- it is a gift from God.*^{Eph.2:8}

3 Instruction about cleansing rites (washings or baptisms): Baptism is a “borrowed” word from the original Greek text. The translators did not know how to translate it so they transliterated it and made it into an English word. In the OT the Priests had to have a ceremonial bath each day they ministered in the Temple to illustrate their cleanness when they came before a holy God. Under the NT we have a “ceremonial bath” of Believer’s Baptism after conversion to illustrate that we are spiritually clean. Baptism doesn’t save us but serves as an illustration of what Jesus has done: *God was patient while Noah was building the ark. He waited, but only a few people went into the ark. A total of eight were saved by means of water. The water of the flood is a picture of the baptism that now saves you also. The baptism I’m talking about has nothing to do with removing dirt from your body. Instead, it promises God that you will keep a clear sense of what is right and wrong. Jesus Christ has saved you by rising from the dead. He has gone into heaven. He is at God’s right hand. Angels, authorities and powers are under his control.*^{1Pet.3:20-22}

But there is also the Baptism of Conversion where the Holy Spirit immerses us into the Body of Christ *For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body.*^{1Cor.12:13}

And there is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit where Jesus immerses us with the Holy Spirit: *‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.*^{Jn.1:33-34}

4 Laying on of hands: There is a Scriptural “laying on of hands” to set someone aside for ministry: *Don’t fail to use the gift the Holy Spirit gave you. He gave it to you through a message from God. It was given when the elders placed their hands on you.*^{1Tim.4:14} *Don’t be too quick to place your hands on others to set them apart to serve God.*^{1Tim.5:22} *Then the apostles prayed and placed their hands on them.*^{Acts6:6} This is quite different from the heretical “Apostolic Succession” where “grace” is supposedly transmitted from the Apostles by each generation of bishops through the imposition of hands. *Where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*^{Ps.121:1-2} We trace our “succession” from God through Jesus Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit because God’s Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom – it is the reign of Jesus within us, not a geographical or sensual (of the senses or natural) kingdom.

There is also a “laying on of hands” when praying for healing: *He said to them, “Go into all the world. Preach the good news to everyone... Here are the miraculous signs that those who believe will do... They will place their hands on sick people. And the people will get well.”*^{Mk.16:15-18}

5 Resurrection of the dead: There is a future resurrection for every person when: *the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”*^{1Cor.15:52-54}

6 Eternal judgment: There is no “oblivion” where people “disappear” after death because we each have an eternal spirit that cannot be annihilated or destroyed. God’s purpose is that we spend eternity with Him but only on His terms of accepting His forgiveness through Jesus Christ. The alternative is terror and torment: *This is how it will be on judgment day. The angels will come. They will separate the people who did what is wrong from those who did what is right. They will throw the evil people into the blazing furnace. There the evil ones will sob and grind their teeth.*^{Matt.13:49-50}

Let’s ensure that we have a clear understanding of these basic truths so we can build on them and live a mature Christian life free from debt, regret and stress!

Sunday 23rd June 2013 Ps.111 Acts 26

What is the purpose of life?

We would all like to live out our lives in comfort and luxury but what this world calls “wealth” and “security” is not our goal nor is it our purpose in life. Indeed wealth can bring many problems. *Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.*^{1Tim.6:6-10}

Agur wrote this advice: O God, I beg two favours from you; let me have them before I die. First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name.^{Pron.30:7-9}

However we must be good stewards of the resources God has given us: “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own? “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him. Then he said to them, “You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honours is detestable in the sight of God.”^{Lk.16:10-15}

Our main purpose in life is to honour God: Man’s chief end in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.^{Westminster Shorter Catechism}

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment”^{Matt.22:36-38}

No one looks forward to trouble or hardship but adversity is not only a fact of life (*Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward*^{Job.5:7}) but it is also a promise of Jesus: *In this world you will have trouble.*^{Jn.16:33}

The good news of our Christian Faith is that we have peace with God in spite of our circumstances and not because of them. *But take heart! I have overcome the world.*^{Jn.16:33}

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.^{Rom.5:1-2}

This peace with God permeates our whole being and so affects every part of our life, including our attitudes, conversations, families and friends.

We are counted “right” with God when we believe Him (in the same way that Abraham was): “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.^{Gal.3:6-9} This “faith” was given to us when our spiritual eyes were opened and we saw Jesus as God’s Sacrifice for sin: *When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”^{Jn.1:36} You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*^{1Pet.1:18-19}

Reading the Bible is good, but by itself is not enough to receive faith because there is a “veil” over the people’s minds and for them Jesus remains just a “prophet” or a “good person” or a “myth” or sometimes even as a “hate-figure”! There has to be a work of the Holy Spirit to “unveil” Jesus so we see Him as “the Christ... the Son of the living God.”^{Matt.16:16} *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.*^{2Cor.3:14-17} God speaks primarily through His Word^{Heb.1:3} and we must hear Him speak to us personally if we are to respond to Him: *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.*^{1Thes.2:13} **We really are changed when we hear God’s voice and our response is to live a life that is clean and honouring to Him:** *Don't you know that evil people will not receive God's kingdom? Don't be fooled. Those who commit sexual sins will not receive the kingdom. Neither will those who worship statues of gods or commit adultery. Neither will men who are prostitutes or who commit homosexual acts. Neither will thieves or those who always want more and more. Neither will those who are often drunk or tell lies or cheat. People who live like that will not receive God's kingdom. Some of you used to do those things. But your sins were washed away. You were made holy. You were made right with God. All of that was done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*^{1Cor.6:9-11} Even non-Christians will see the difference: *Dear friends, you are outsiders and strangers in this world. So I'm asking you not to give in to your sinful longings. They fight against your soul. People who don't believe might say you are doing wrong. But lead good lives among them. Then they will see your good works. And they will give glory to God on the day he comes to judge.*^{1Pet.2:11-12}

BUT living a good life that is honouring to God is not our only purpose in life – we are to also love our neighbour: *And the second [commandment] is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’^{Matt.22:39}* The best demonstration of loving our neighbour is to help them turn from Satan to God: *to open the eyes of the outsiders so they can see the difference between dark and light, and choose light, see the difference between Satan and God, and choose God. I'm sending you off to present my offer of sins forgiven, and a place in the family, inviting them into the company of those who begin real living by believing in me.*^{Acts26:18} God has given us the SEED Principle where we give to others out of what God has given to us: *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you.*^{1Cor.11:23} *God supplies seed to the planter. He supplies bread for food. God will also supply and increase the amount of your seed. He will increase the results of your good works. You will be made rich in every way. Then you can always give freely. We will take your many gifts to the people who need them. And they will give thanks to God. Your gifts meet the needs of God's people. And that's not all. Your gifts also cause many people to thank God. You have shown yourselves to be worthy by what you have given. So people will praise God because you obey him. That proves that you really believe the good news about Christ. They will also praise God because you share freely with them and with everyone else.*^{2Cor.9:10-13} Seed is much more than money or “things”. Seed can be support and care: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all*

comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.^{2Cor.1:3-4}

Evangelism is telling the Gospel (Good News) of Jesus Christ. The Word of God is Seed^{Lk.8:11} and it is the best Seed to sow and the best way of showing our love for others: *I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.*^{Acts 26:20} *We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true... And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.*^{1Thes.1:4-10}

We will live a contented & fulfilled life when we stay focused on life's true purpose.

Sunday 30th June 2013 Ps.142 Acts 27

Who's in Charge Here? *My troubles are like a prison. Set me free so I can praise your name.*^{Ps.42:7}

A prison can be an emotional confinement as well as a physical confinement because anything that confines or controls you makes you its prisoner or slave. *For you are a slave to whatever controls you.*^{2Pet.2:19} But although Paul was physically a prisoner and placed in the custody of a Roman officer,^{Acts27:1} he was certainly not an emotional or a spiritual “prisoner”! Paul showed no signs of “depression” or being “down-in-the-dumps” because of his unfair circumstances and he kept the faith^{Ps.42} because he knew that *Jesus is Lord.*^{Rom.10:9-10} Three years previously Paul had written to the Church at Rome that Christianity is not difficult or complicated but simple, settled and spiritual! *But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*^{Rom.10:6-9}

Even as a prisoner, Paul was able to give sound judgements and advice on natural as well as spiritual matters because he personally knew Jesus Christ was his Lord and Saviour: *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.*^{1Cor.1:30} This should be normal for all Christians because *the Sovereign LORD has given me his words of wisdom, so that I know how to comfort the weary. Morning by morning he wakens me and opens my understanding to his will. The Sovereign LORD has spoken to me, and I have listened. I have not rebelled or turned away.*^{Is.50:4-5}

Once we become a Christian, the work really begins because we are no longer free to choose to do wrong or do whatever we want – we have a new Master who is holy and insists that His servants live holy lives: *Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.*^{Rom.6:15-18}

Although we are free from guilt we are not free to do as we want because we are under an obligation to serve God: *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to*

the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.^{Rom.8:12-13} 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.^{Gal.5:1}

So how do we live in this “freedom” – as prisoners of life, hope and righteousness (instead of prisoners of death, doubt and sin)?

1 Keep focused on our purpose of life (see last week’s message) – Glorify God by living a life that honours Him and love other people by telling them about God’s love.

2 Become Bible Literate (i.e. have a good understanding and working knowledge of the Bible). We should be able to explain to others the basics of the 3R’s of Biblical literacy: **Repentance, Remission of sins and Righteousness** because we pay attention to God’s Word^{Prov.4:20-23} and have trained [our]selves with a lot of practice and can tell the difference between good and evil.^{Heb.5:14} Then we will be like the men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.^{1Chron.12:32} To know the right thing and then do it - even if it is difficult - is the hallmark of a wise person: *the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, even when a person is in trouble.*^{Ecc.8:5-6}

Repentance. The Greek word means a change of mind. *If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.*^{Jas.1:5-8} A true Christian is prepared to look at Truth and align their views to God’s view. Contrast this with a bigot who is intolerant of any ideas other than their own. Repentance is different from remorse (which is feeling sorry for being found out!) and **true repentance changes lives but leaves no scars:** *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.*^{Matt.3:8} *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*^{2Cor.7:10} **True repentance from sin will always include: Acknowledgement of the wrong. Apology for the wrong. Action of determination to change. Appreciation of God’s forgiveness. Attitude of grace, gratitude and gentleness towards God and people.**

We need to change our minds about God, as well as about what He says about sin and ourselves, and then believe what God believes: *You should think in the same way Christ Jesus does.*^{Phil.2:5} *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (let your way of thinking be completely changed^{NIV}). Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*^{Rom.12:2} *God is love;*^{1Jn.4:16} *He loves the world;*^{1Jn.3:16} *the Church*^{Eph.5:25} *and also us as individuals.*^{Gal.2:20}

Remission of Sins. *Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*^{Lk.24:25-47ASV} **Remission means dismissal or release** and is also translated as “**forgiveness**” or “**freedom**”:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim **freedom** for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed **free**, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.*^{Lk.4:18-19}

God has dismissed our sins from us and we are no longer joined to them. Yes those of us who believe in Jesus Christ are freed from our sins! Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.^{Acts13:38-39} *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.*^{Rev.1:5}

Righteousness. The English word means “**right-wise-ness**” - we are right with God and wise about it (i.e. we are acting upon the information).

How are we “right with God”? *Christ didn't have any sin. But God made him become sin for us. So we can be made right with God because of what Christ has done for us.*^{2Cor.5:21} *But now God has shown us how to become right with him. The Law and the Prophets give witness to this. It has nothing to do with obeying the law. We are made right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. That happens to all who believe. It is no different for the Jews than for anyone else. Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God's glory. The free gift of God's grace makes all of us right with him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free. God gave him as a sacrifice to pay for sins. So he forgives the sins of those who have faith in his blood.*^{Rom.3:21-25}

When we know that we are “right with God” we should:

1 be bold: *but the righteous are as bold as a lion.*^{Pron.28:1} *Now, Lord, consider the bad things they say they are going to do. Help us to be very bold when we speak your word. Stretch out your hand to heal. Do miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”*^{Acts 4:29-30}

2 be bold in coming to God - *So let us boldly approach the throne of grace. Then we will receive mercy. We will find grace to help us when we need it.*^{Heb.4:16NIrV}

3 be bold in proclaiming Jesus *“You can't be saved by believing in anyone else. God has given us no other name under heaven that will save us.” The leaders saw how bold Peter and John were. They also realized that Peter and John were ordinary men with no training. This surprised the leaders. They realized that these men had been with Jesus.*^{Acts4:12-13NIrV}

4 be bold in our praying (which will be effective): *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*^{Jas.5:16} *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.*^{1Pet.3:12}

Never apologise for God, His Word or our Faith. We are neither prisoners nor slaves to this world or its values because we are redeemed and we belong to God

Remember to Whom you belong

I am created by God; I am His. I am redeemed by God; I am His.

I am twice His: by original right and also by purchase.

I belong to Jesus Christ.

God defends me; I am His. God corrects me; He makes use of me; I am His.

He loves me and He delights in me.

I belong to Jesus Christ.

I am my Beloved's and He is mine.

No-one else possesses any right or power over me. All that is mine is His.

I belong to Jesus Christ.

All my sin, weakness and shortcomings, I give to Him.

He has taken all my condemnation, misery and fear.

I belong to Jesus Christ.

His strength is my strength, His righteousness is my righteousness.

His wisdom is my wisdom and His holiness is my holiness.

I belong to Jesus Christ.

He is my God. He is my Father.

His family is my family and His heaven is my home.

I belong to Jesus Christ

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.”^{Jn.8:34-36}

July

God the Saviour: *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.* ^{Titus .3:4-5}

Sunday 7th July 2013 Ps.112 Gen.47:1-11

> - Greater Than

In algebra “>” means “greater than”: $a > b > c \setminus a > c$. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh... Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh again before leaving his court. ^{Gen.47:7-10} And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. ^{Heb.7:7}

God's Values include holiness, honesty, rightness, love, justice, fairness, compassion, cleanness and are very different from this world's values. The values this world call important such as social status, monetary wealth, fame, influence and personal comfort mean nothing to God: *You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honours is detestable in the sight of God.* ^{Lk.16:10-15} Watch out! Be on your guard against wanting to have more and more things. Life is not made up of how much a person has... But God said to him, ‘You foolish man! This very night I will take your life away from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ That is how it will be for anyone who stores things away for himself but is not rich in God's eyes. ^{Lk.12:15-21} The early Church were accused of disrupting this world's values: “Paul and Silas have turned the rest of the world upside down, and now they are here disturbing our city,” they shouted. “And Jason has let them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, Jesus.” ^{Acts 17:6-7} However, we should always give respect and honour to others including those in authority: *For the Lord's sake, respect all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honour those who do right... Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.* ^{1Pet.2:13-17} Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. And give to God what belongs to God. ^{Matt.22:21} But that respect should never intimidate Believers because *the one who is in [us] is greater than the one who is in the world.* ^{1Jn.4:4} The Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you. ^{Rom.8:11}

We have greater status than Monarchs and Presidents – we are children of God and have a permanent home: *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.* ^{1Jn.3:1-3} Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ^{Jn.8:35}

We have greater wealth than mere money – we have the true riches of God's blessings and His unlimited resources: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* ^{Eph.1:3} The blessing of the LORD makes a person rich, and he adds no sorrow with it. ^{Prov.10:22}

We have greater fame than this world can give – we are known by God: *But now that you know God—or rather are known by God.* ^{Gal.4:9} But those who love God are known by God. ^{1Cor.8:3}

We have greater influence than this world can know – we are God's friends: *Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. He was even called the friend of God* ^{Jas.2:23} You are the children of my friend Abraham. ^{Isa 41:8} Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ^{Gal.3:7} No one has greater love than the one who gives his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I do not call you servants anymore. Servants do

not know their master's business. Instead, I have called you friends. I have told you everything I learned from my Father.^{Jn.15:13-13}

We have greater comfort than this world can ever give – we have peace with God and His personal comfort: *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*^{2Pet.1:2} *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*^{2Cor.1:3-4}

So why do so many people find it difficult to accept God's evaluation of life? Because they are still seeing life naturally with their senses and not their spiritual eyes. 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.^{Eph.1:18-19}

Paul the Apostle saw a great light^{Acts 26:13} and that light was Jesus who said: *I am sending you 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.*^{Acts 26:17-18} **We may not have had such a physically dramatic encounter with Jesus but our conversion was just as spiritually dramatic:** *Suppose our good news is covered with a veil. Then it is veiled to those who are dying. The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They can't see the light of the good news of Christ's glory. He is the likeness of God. We do not preach about ourselves. We preach about Jesus Christ. We say that he is Lord. And we serve you because of him. God said, "Let light shine out of darkness." He made his light shine in our hearts. It shows us the light of God's glory in the face of Christ.*^{2Cor.4:3-6}

Believing is Faith in God which means we place our trust and confidence in God based on **His Character** (how He has behaved in the past) and **His Word** (what He has recorded about Himself). The Word, ultimately is Jesus (the Living Word who revealed God to us), but the Word is also the Scriptures (the written Word which is God's record of His plan of Redemption revealed in Jesus). *"The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."* ...*He richly blesses everyone who calls on him. Scripture says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*^{Rom.10:11} Although it is easier to focus on the sensible (what is experienced by our senses), it takes faith to see beyond the natural: *We don't give up. Our bodies are becoming weaker and weaker. But our spirits are being renewed day by day. Our troubles are small. They last only for a short time. But they are earning for us a glory that will last forever. It is greater than all our troubles. So we don't spend all our time looking at what we can see. Instead, we look at what we can't see. What can be seen lasts only a short time. But what can't be seen will last forever.*^{2Cor.4:16-18} Faith is not wishful thinking or superstition but a sweet and gentle confident certainty in God: *Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it. Faith is the reason we remember great people who lived in the past. It is by faith we understand that the whole world was made by God's command so what we see was made by something that cannot be seen.*^{Heb.11:1-3} When God's light shines in our heart, faith becomes natural and is easy: *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*^{Eph.5:8-14}

Now Christ has shone His light on us we have an obligation to honour Him as God and Saviour. Whilst there are many aspects to our Church Services, our primary purpose is to pay our respect to God (worship Him). (The other ingredients of our Church Services, such as fellowship, encouragement, pastoral care, love and friendship are really important but secondary to honouring God through Jesus Christ.) This makes Christianity unique among all other religions because God can only be known or experienced through Jesus Christ – **Jesus is the only Way to God.**^{Jn.14:6} Paying our respect to God includes honouring Him in our songs and conversations (praise), responding to Him (prayer) and also listening to Him speak to us (prophecy). God speaks to us by His Son^{Heb.1:1-3} through His Spirit (who resides within us^{2Cor.1:22}). He speaks through our conversation, our conscience and even our songs but primarily through the Scriptures which are Canon (the absolute measurement by which we evaluate everything that God is saying). That is the reason why we strive to be Bible Literate. **We are NT Believers living in the benefits of Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension and His outpouring of the Holy Spirit.** By being Bible Literate we will not be distracted or deceived^{Gal.3:1} because we will know the Truth which sets us free.^{Jn.8:32}

d > e > f \d >f (where d = NT Believers, e = John the Baptist and f = OT Believers **because** NT Believers have a *covenant is better than the old one. It is based on better promises*^{Heb.8:6} and they have the Holy Spirit residing within them: *for he lives with you and will be in you.*^{Jn.14:17}) *I tell you, John is greater than any other person ever born, but even the least important person in the kingdom of God is greater than John.*^{Lk.7:28}

Yes! We really are qualified to bless others (as Jacob blessed Pharaoh) **because God has made his light shine in our hearts.**^{2Cor.4:3-6} *Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*^{Is.60:1}

Let us bless one another, let us bless one another; the blessing of the Lord is keeping you. May He make His face to shine on you; the Lord be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you & give you peace.^{Numbers 6:25-26}

Sunday July 14th 2013 Ps.113 Acts 27-28:10

Is satan a sneaky snake or a defeated dragon?

The stories in Scripture are spiritually significant but sometimes they are also symbolic or allegorical as well. We know that Paul had many more experiences than the Bible records in detail, as intimated in 2Cor.11 which was written from Macedonia in AD 55 or 56 (5 or 6 years before his journey to Rome in Acts 27). Luke wrote selectively of Paul's ministry (he only joined Paul at Troas @ AD51, part way through his 2nd Missionary journey^{Acts 16:11}) as John wrote selectively of Jesus' ministry: *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*^{Jn.20:30-31} So the story of the snake in Acts 28:3 obviously has more significance than just an entry in Luke's diary.

The devil is linked with snakes from the very beginning: *The serpent was more clever (crafty or shrewd) than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. The serpent said to the woman, "Did God really say...? So the LORD God spoke to the serpent. He said, "Because you have done this, "I am putting a curse on you. You are cursed more than all of the livestock and all of the wild animals. You will crawl on the ground. You will eat dust all of the days of your life."*^{Gen.3:1-14} *But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by*

the cunning ways of the serpent. You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.^{2Cor.11:3-4} Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.^{Rev.12:7-9} He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or satan, and bound him for a thousand years.^{Rev.20:2}

The snake (devil) was crafty or clever. The devil is a real created being that used to be an angel.^{Ezek.28:14;Rev.12:9} He is not omniscient like God but a liar, murderer^{Jn.8:44} and thief.^{Jn.10:10} Being clever is not wrong but we must use our knowledge for good – wisdom. We are to be shrewd but harmless: *“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd (practically wise, sensible, wary) as snakes and as harmless as doves.”*^{Matt.10:16} Too often we Christians are naïve and are put to shame by the world over the way we use our resources: *The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.*^{Lk.16:8-9}

The snake (devil) was cursed to crawl on the ground and eat dust. The devil is not omnipotent like God but reduced to creeping! He may have taken a ⅓ of the angels with him^{Rev.12:4} but that means God still has twice as many angels as the devil! We need to realise where the devil is and where we are! *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*^{Eph.2:6} *What is a human being that you think about him? What is the son of man that you take care of him? You made him a little lower than the angels. You placed on him a crown of glory and honour. You have put everything under his control.*^{Heb.2:6-8} Yes the devil is under our feet and eats dirt – don’t copy him!

The snake (devil) was able to deceive (and is still able to deceive). Although satan is disarmed, he can still talk: *Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.*^{1Pet.5:8-9} Even Believers are capable of being deceived: *I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*^{Rom.16:17-18} The devil attacks our minds so let’s change the way we think and “renew” our minds: *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. (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.)*^{Rom.12:2} We protect our mind with the knowledge that we are saved and with the Word of God: *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*^{Eph.6:17}

The snake (devil) was thrown out of heaven. *“Yes,” he told them, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning!”*^{Lk.10:2:18} The devil is not omnipresent like God but can only be at one place at one time! He is also called an accuser but now he has no place in heaven and God does not listen to him: *Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them*

before our God day and night, has been hurled down.^{Rev.12:10} The blood of Jesus is louder than any other voice and shouts “Mercy”! *You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.*^{Heb.12:24} We have no fear of the devil’s accusations.

The snake (devil) was (and is still) bound (imprisoned). The devil is a created spirit which means he is eternal and cannot be annihilated. But he is bound and so he cannot harm us if we stay away from him because we are safe in God’s care: *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*^{Deut.33:27} *We know that God’s children do not make a practice of sinning, for God’s Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them. We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the control of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us understanding so that we can know the true God. 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. Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God’s place in your hearts.*^{1Jn.5:18-21} Bunyon in “Pilgrim’s Progress” saw the devil as a chained lion – roaring but restricted. We are safe if we don’t go near him! Jesus was able to dispel the devil with 3 Bible verses.^{Lk.4:1-14} Now satan is disarmed and defeated it should take us even fewer Bible verses to dispel him!!!

Jesus not only destroyed the devil’s work^{1Jn.3:8} at Calvary but He disarmed,^{Col.2:15} defeated,^{Rev.12:8} and destroyed^{Heb.2:14-15} the devil himself there too! There is a wonderful illustration of this defeat in the OT: *Adoni-Bezek fled, but they chased him and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes. Then Adoni-Bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them.” They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.*^{Judges 1:6-7} This defeat of the devil was also pre-viewed when the Israelites rebelled against God: *But the people grew impatient with the long journey, and they began to speak against God and Moses... So the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. Then the people came to Moses and cried out, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take away the snakes.” So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD told him, “Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!” So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!*^{Nu.21:8} *And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*^{Jn.3:14-15} Eventually the Israelites worshipped the snake instead of God and so Hezekiah destroyed it: *Hezekiah did what was pleasing in the LORD’s sight, just as his ancestor David had done. He broke up the bronze serpent that Moses had made, because the people of Israel had been offering sacrifices to it.*^{2Kings 18:4} This is a clear warning for us not to venerate religious objects including “crosses”!

Jesus cast out devils with a “flick” of His finger: *But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.*^{Lk.11:20-22} **As Believers we too can just “shake the snake off” when we have trouble:** *a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand. But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed.*^{Acts 28:3-6} *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 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.^{Mk.16:18} *The person who rests in the shadow of the Most High God will be kept safe by the Mighty One... You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!*^{Ps.91:1-13}

When Jesus died He freed us from the devil's control. *[Jesus] too shared in [our] humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*^{Heb.2:14-15}

The devil may be a “sneaky snake” but he is also a “defeated dragon” so let's live like Believers in the constant awareness of God's love: *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*^{Rom.8:38-39}

Sunday 21st July 2013 Ps.115 Acts 28

How do you visualize the Kingdom of God? *He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ*^{Acts 28:31}

There can be no kingdom without a king and a domain, and there can be no Kingdom of God without God's King and His Domain! The Jews had been promised a Kingdom with a King and that had been their national and religious hope for centuries: *Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God.*^{Lk.15:43} *Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.*^{Lk.2:25} Mary was told that she was the one who would bear this Messiah - God's Son: *Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king like his father David of long ago. He will rule forever over his people, who came from Jacob's family. His kingdom will never end.*^{Lk.1:30-33}

This Messiah was to usher in a new religious Order, a new sort of Kingdom with new rules and where justice (grace but not “fairness”) and joy were the trademarks.

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.^{Rom.14:17} *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*^{Is.9:6-7} *But here is what he says about the Son. “You are God. Your throne will last for ever and ever. Your kingdom will be ruled by what is right. You have loved what is right and hated what is evil. So your God has placed you above your companions. He has filled you with joy by pouring the sacred oil on your head.”*^{Heb.1:8-9} When Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, He declared that He was God's King and that His Domain (rule) was about to begin: *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!”*^{Mk.1:14-15}

This Domain is a spiritual kingdom – the rule of Christ in our hearts: *Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “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.”*^{Lk.17:20-21}

This Domain will dominate the whole world: *“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. “The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”* ^{Dan.2:44-45} But this Domain of God’s King is not geographical as the Jews had expected because the whole world has always belonged to God: *If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.* ^{Ps.50:12}

This Domain was new even though it had been prophesied about for millennia: *Paul witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus.* ^{Acts 28:23} *I have been saying nothing different from what the prophets and Moses said would happen. They said the Christ would suffer. He would be the first to rise from the dead. He would announce the light of life to his own people and to those who aren’t Jews.”* ^{Acts 26:22-23} This is why the OT Scriptures are still important for us today, not as a science or history book, or even a book on life to help us make the right moral choices but the OT Scriptures are important because they help us better understand the Kingdom of God. They are a “Pictionary” where real life examples are recorded to explain to us spiritual truths relevant to God’s Kingdom (c.f. *Adoni-Bezek* and *the bronze snake* from last week).

This Domain is not “Jew-ish” but “Jesus-ish” because we cannot be part of it unless we come through Jesus the Christ. *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* ^{Jn.14:6} *“What I’m about to tell you is true. No one can see God’s kingdom without being born again.”* ^{Jn.3:3} **Those who oppose God’s Christ are “Antichrists”.** The “Antichrist” is not some future “beast” or “monster” who will destroy the world but a description of anyone who opposes Jesus Christ. John wrote that many antichrists had already come: *Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come... Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.* ^{1Jn.2:18-23} *but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.* ^{1Jn.4:3} Actually “antichrist” is not mentioned in the book of Revelation but there are plenty of examples of “antichrists” there! The 2 Beasts in chapter 13 exactly match the description of Roman Empire (which was under Nero when John wrote Revelation): *and I saw a beast coming out of the sea* ^{Rev.13:1; Dan.7:3;7} and Judaism (which was under the High Priest): *then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth.* ^{Rev.13:11} This second beast, Judaism, exercises authority given to it from Rome and is seen most graphically in its union with Rome to have Christ put to death. *He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.* ^{Rev.13:13} Judaism, personified as this second beast, was well known for its apparent miraculous signs. Both Jesus ^{Matt.12:27} and Paul ^{Acts 13:6} acknowledged that Judaism had miracle workers during their time. *And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.* ^{Rev.13:14} Jesus warned his generation of followers not to be deceived when this happened: *For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.* ^{Mk.13:22} Revelation reveals that this

second beast (Judaism) encouraged the people to honour and worship the first beast (Rome). Perhaps the most telling New Testament verse endorsing the seeds of this great apostasy is: *But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"*^{John 19:15}

This Domain ushered in a new religious Order with a new Covenant and a new Priesthood. This new Priesthood was modelled on a person called Melchizedek: *You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.*^{Ps.110:4} *This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of God Most High. When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against the kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him... The name Melchizedek means "king of justice," and king of Salem means "king of peace." There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God. Consider then how great this Melchizedek was. Even Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel, recognized this by giving him a tenth of what he had taken in battle.*^{Heb.7:1-4}

This Domain's Order is much greater than the OT Order because we have both King and Priest in the same Person who lives for ever. That is why the OT Order is obsolete and those who want to live by it are "antichristian". God has finished with the old because He has introduced the new which is better in every way! *But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.*^{Heb.8:6}

This Domain's Order is for NOW not just for the future: *Christ came to be the high priest of the good things that are already here.*^{Heb.9:11} The OT was always looking for something better - something to be fulfilled - but the NT has brought the promises into the NOW – Jesus's Promises are for us TODAY as well as for TOMORROW! Moses was initially rejected by the Jews but eventually they acknowledge him as God's leader: *This is the same Moses the two men of Israel would not accept. They had said, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' But God himself sent Moses to rule the people of Israel and set them free.*^{Acts.7:35} However they always gave Moses a hard time. *They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."*^{Ex.17:33-4} This is an example for us not to make the same mistake with Jesus our Leader who Delivers us from the slavery of sin... *Brothers and sisters, make sure that none of you has a sinful heart. Do not let an unbelieving heart turn you away from the living God. But build one another up every day. Do it as long as there is still time. Then none of you will become stubborn. You won't be fooled by sin's tricks... God's promise of enjoying his rest still stands. So be careful that none of you fails to receive it... It is still true that some will enjoy that rest. But those who had the good news preached to them earlier didn't go in. That was because they didn't obey. So let us make every effort to enjoy that rest. Then no one will fall into sin by following the example of those who didn't obey God... Nothing God created is hidden from him. His eyes see everything. He will hold us accountable for everything we do.*^{Heb.3:12-4:13}

This Domain of God is Blessed.^{Matt.5} Let's be sure we "enter in" to God's promise of rest, peace and contentment^{Rom.14:17} and not miss out because of unbelief or by rejecting God's Word.

**I'm a conqueror, victorious, I'm living in Jesus,
I'm seated in heavenly places, in Him, in Him.
For the kingdom of God is within me, I know no defeat, only victory,
For the kingdom of God is within me,
I know no defeat, only strength & power.**

Sunday 28th July 2013 Ps.116 Jn.1:1-28

A “man on a mission” – is that you? *There was a man sent from God whose name was John.*^{Jn.1:6} As Believers in Jesus Christ we are now people with a purpose and this should show in the way we conduct our daily lives. Meandering lives and aimless living may have been part of our past but they should not be part of our present life because: *The blood of Christ set you free from an empty way of life. That way of life was handed down to you by your own people long ago. You know that you were not bought with things that can pass away, like silver or gold. Instead, you were bought by the priceless blood of Christ. He is a perfect lamb. He doesn't have any flaws at all. He was chosen before God created the world. But he came into the world in these last days for you.*^{1Pet.1:18-20}

The principle of “glorifying God and enjoying Him forever” should dominate our whole life and not just our Sunday routine or our “Church” life. **Christians have dedicated their whole lives to God and they have no secular/sacred divide. Our cars and our kitchens are as holy as our Church buildings:** *On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be carved on the bells of the houses. The cooking pots in the LORD's temple will be just like the sacred bowls in front of the altar for burnt offerings.*^{Zech.14:20}

God has always wanted this total commitment but before Jesus came it was rare and limited to a few “super” spiritual people like the Prophets. Elijah was one of those Prophets who was greatly used of God and he was expected to return to herald in the Messianic Kingdom: *I will send you the prophet Elijah. He will come before the day of the LORD arrives. It will be a great and terrifying day. Elijah will teach parents how to love their children. He will also teach children how to honour their parents. If that does not happen, I will come. And I will put a curse on the land.*^{Mal.4:5-6} However God had meant that this “herald” who would usher in the coming Kingdom would “have the same spirit and power that Elijah had” rather than Elijah literally returning from the dead! *But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will have a child. It will be a boy, and you must name him John. He will be a joy and delight to you. His birth will make many people very glad. He will be important in the Lord's eyes. “He must never use wine or other such drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the time he is born. He will bring many of Israel's people back to the Lord their God. And he will prepare the way for the Lord. He will have the same spirit and power that Elijah had. He will teach parents how to love their children. He will also teach people who don't obey to be wise and do what is right. In this way, he will prepare a people who are ready for the Lord.”*^{Lk.1:13-17} **Jesus said that John actually was this “Elijah” thus confirming that the Kingdom had come:** *All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John came. If you are willing to accept it, John is the Elijah who was supposed to come.*^{Matt.11:13-14}

John the Baptist's purpose was to prepare the people to receive the Messiah who was ushering in God's Kingdom. *His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit. He prophesied... “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God. You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare the way for him. You will tell his people how they can be saved. You will tell them that their sins can be forgiven. All of that will happen because our God is tender and caring. His kindness will bring the rising sun to us from heaven. It will shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death. It will guide our feet on the path of peace.”*^{Lk.1:69-79} **Instead of being distant and in heaven, God was now on earth as a human being called Jesus:** *The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the one and only Son. He came from the Father. And he was full of grace and truth. John gives witness about him. He cries out and says, “This was the one I was talking about. I said, ‘He who comes after me is more*

important than I am. He is more important because he existed before I was born.” ^{Jn.1:14-15} This new Kingdom would be the rule of Christ. As this would be in people’s hearts, John’s ministry was predominately preaching repentance – a change of mind to see God for Who He is. *John went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:* ^{Is.40:3-5} *“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God’s salvation.’”* ^{Lk.3:2-6} John’s purpose was to prepare people to receive God’s Answer (the Messiah). He was a “man on a mission”, sent by God ^{Jn.1:6} - an “apostle”. “Apostle” literally means “sent” or a “man on a mission” and every Disciple of Jesus Christ has been sent on a “mission” by Jesus’ great “Co-Mission”: *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* ^{Matt.28:18-20}

Many times in John’s Gospel Jesus affirmed that He was sent from God: *So Jesus said: the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him...* *Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me. I came from God, and now I am here. I have not come on my own. He sent me.”* ^{Jn.8:29-42} As the One sent from God, **Jesus is our Apostle:** *Holy brothers and sisters, God chose you to be his people. So keep thinking about Jesus. He is our apostle. He is our high priest. We believe in him.* ^{Heb.3:1}

Jesus called some of His Disciples to be Apostles: *Jesus called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.* ^{Lk.6:13} He also gave the Gift of Apostles to some: *He is the One who gave some the gift to be apostles...* *He did it so that they might prepare God's people to serve. If they do, the body of Christ will be built up.* ^{Eph.4:11-12} In this context “apostles” are leaders in the church who have a proven ministry of miracles: *Even though I am nothing, I am in no way less important than the “super-apostles.” You can recognize apostles by the signs, wonders and miracles they do. Those things were faithfully done among you no matter what happened.* ^{2Cor.12:11-12} Obviously these “apostles” were not restricted to the 12 Disciples (who He called Apostles) or else everyone would have recognised the “false apostles” for what they were: *People like that are false apostles. They work hard to trick others. They only pretend to be apostles of Christ. That comes as no surprise. Even Satan himself pretends to be an angel of light. So it doesn't surprise us that those who serve Satan pretend to be serving God. They will finally get exactly what they should.* ^{2Cor.11:13-15} In fact there many more named apostles in the NT than the original 12, including Paul’s relatives: *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives. They have been in prison with me. They are leaders among the apostles.* ^{Rom.16:7}

Sometimes the word “apostle” is translated “representative”: *As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives [apostles, delegates or messengers] of the churches and an honour to Christ.* ^{2Cor.8:23} **If we represent Jesus Christ we are an “apostle” – a “man on a mission” and a “person with a purpose”.** It makes no difference what role we have in God’s Kingdom because: *each one of us has received a gift of grace, just as Christ wanted us to have it.* ^{Eph.4:7} The list of gifts in Ephesians 4 is only a partial list and there are many more gifts: *In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability,*

take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.^{Rom.12:6-8} You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body": apostles prophets teachers miracle workers healers helpers organizers those who pray in tongues. But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, uni-dimensional Part? It's not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called "important" parts. But now I want to lay out a far better way for you: **the Way of Love**^{1Cor.12:27-31}

A "man on a mission" and a "person with a purpose"?

Yes! That's us!!! We are on a mission is to represent God faithfully through the revelation of Jesus Christ: *Everything about him is delightful. That's what the one who loves me is like. That's what my friend is like.*^{SofS.5:16}

So let's fulfil the Great Commission^{Matt.28:18-20} **with all the passion and skill we have!**

August

God the Baptizer: *John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* ^{Lk.3:16}

Sunday 4th August 2013 Ps.116

Christ in you the hope of Glory ^{Col.1:27} - A plea for a greater appreciation of Jesus' life in us!

I'm too blessed to be stressed! This cliché sounds good but it is only true if we meet the requirements. Only when we are "in Christ" can we claim God's promises: *For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.* ^{2Cor.1:20} **So what does "in Christ" actually mean?** It means that we identify ourselves with Christ: *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.]* ^{Gal.2:20}

When we belong to Christ we are blessed with every spiritual blessing: *Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Those blessings come from the heavenly world. They belong to us because we belong to Christ.* ^{Eph.1:3} God's blessings are abundant: *the blessing of the LORD makes a person rich, and he adds no sorrow with it* ^{Pron.10:22} and combine both natural blessings (Mt Hermon) with spiritual blessings (Mt Zion): *It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.* ^{Ps.133:3}

Jesus took examples of everyday objects to illustrate spiritual truths.

As a gate is the entrance, so it is only Jesus who is the entrance to God: *What I'm about to tell you is true. I am like a gate for the sheep. All those who ever came before me were thieves and robbers. But the sheep did not listen to them. I'm like a gate. Anyone who enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out. And he will find plenty of food.* ^{Jn.10:7-9} *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* ^{Jn.14:6}

As bread is the staple food, so it is only Jesus who can really sustain us: *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."* ^{Jn.6:35}

As water quenches the thirst, so it is only Jesus who can really quench our spiritual thirst: *Jesus 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.* ^{Jn.7:37-39}

As a good shepherd cares for his sheep, so it is only Jesus who can really care for us: *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so they can have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. The hired man ... does not care about the sheep.* ^{Jn.10:10-13}

There is only One Body of Believers and we all share in the One Faith: *For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.* ^{Eph.4:4-6}

This one body also includes the Believers in the OT (it was Faith in God that made them Believers!): *Abram believed the LORD. The LORD accepted Abram because he believed. So his faith made him right with the LORD.*^{Gen.15:6} *Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it. Faith is the reason we remember great people who lived in the past. By faith Abel; By faith Enoch; By faith Noah; By faith Abraham; By faith Isaac; By faith Jacob; By faith Joseph; By faith Moses... etc.*^{Heb.11:1f}

The source of salvation has always been the unmerited mercy of God. Our Sovereign owes no rebel a pardon. That He extends clemency to any is a pure gift of grace.^{Eph.2:8, Titus3:4-7} **The ground of salvation has always been the redemption secured by Christ on the cross.** OT saints had not yet learned about Jesus but were still saved because of Him. God *passed over the sins previously committed*^{Rom.3:25} knowing the full, complete, and final payment would be made at the cross.^{Heb.9:15, 10:10-18} **And the means of salvation has also been constant.** Every sinner ever justified gained access to God's mercy by faith. Whether in OT or NT, active trust in God's grace appropriated His mercy. In every age, the just have lived by faith.^{Gen.15:6, Hab.2:4, Rom.4:5, 5:1etc}

However the required mode or practice of the OT Believers was very different from the requirements of NT Believers. Although the OT Believers were saved by Faith in God, they also had to keep to a strict liturgy of rituals including religious festivals, dress-code, food-laws and even knowing one's family tree. These rituals typified or pre-figured the Messiah (*who we now know is Jesus*) who would fulfil them and thus provide the salvation with forgiveness. These rituals were a necessary but temporary burden until He came but no-one could actually keep those rituals completely! *Brothers, you know that some time ago God chose me to take the good news to those who aren't Jews. He wanted them to hear the good news and believe. God knows the human heart. By giving the Holy Spirit to non-Jews, he showed that he accepted them. He did the same for them as he had done for us. He showed that there is no difference between us and them. He made their hearts pure because of their faith. Now then, why are you trying to test God? You test him when you put a heavy load on the believers' shoulders. Our people of long ago couldn't carry that load. We can't either. No! We believe we are saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus. Those who aren't Jews are saved in the same way.*^{Acts15:7-11}

Once Jesus came and introduced the New Covenant, the OT rituals were obsolete: *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and out-dated will soon disappear.*^{Heb.8:13} *They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order... 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.*^{Heb.9:10-15}

Now it is Faith in God, as revealed through Jesus Christ, that saves us. (Actually it is Jesus who saves us and our faith in Him appropriates our salvation – i.e. makes it ours): *Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.*^{Acts16:31} *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (or "to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins"). And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.*^{Acts2:38-39}

We no longer have to try to imagine what God is like, because Jesus is God with a Body: *the Word became a human being. He made his home with us.*^{Jn.1:14} Although Jesus died, He rose from the dead with a real body of "flesh and bones": *Jesus himself suddenly stood among them. ...He said, "Why are you troubled? Why do you have doubts in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is really I! Touch me and see. A ghost does not have a body or bones. But you can see that I*

do.” ...*They gave him a piece of cooked fish. He took it and ate it in front of them.*^{Lk.24:36-42} When Jesus ascended to heaven, He went there physically in His Body, and so we can now believe in, and communicate with, **God in Human form - Jesus:** *After Jesus said this, he was taken up to heaven. They watched until a cloud hid him from their sight. While he was going up, they kept on looking at the sky. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothing stood beside them. “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.”*^{Acts 1:9-11}

One of the unique blessings of the NT is that we each have direct and permanent access to God through the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent in His place – His “Substitute”. *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.*^{Jn.14:16-17} *When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.*^{Jn.15:26} Today it is just as if we have Jesus with us physically. That’s how real the Holy Spirit is – He is just like Jesus but without a body! So when we talk about being “*in Christ*” we mean that we belong to Jesus Christ and have the Holy Spirit (His “Substitute”) with us at all times: *The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you.*^{Rom.8:11}

Our testimony is what we personally know about God. There is beauty, grace, loveliness and a sweet fragrance about Jesus that has “rubbed off” onto those who know Him. Because our testimony is our story of how we met Jesus and how He changed our life, it is attractive: *In the Messiah, in Christ, God leads us from place to place in one perpetual victory parade. Through us, he brings knowledge of Christ. Everywhere we go, people breathe in the exquisite fragrance. Because of Christ, we give off a sweet scent rising to God, which is recognized by those on the way of salvation—an aroma redolent with life. But those on the way to destruction treat us more like the stench from a rotting corpse.*^{2Cor.2:14-16} That’s why our personal testimony is such a good way to communicate the Christian message: *God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift. It is not based on anything you have done. No one can boast about earning it.*^{Eph.2:8-9} *You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, “Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!”? Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.*^{Col.2:20-23}

**Because we belong to Christ (are “*in Christ*”) and Christ is in us,
we really are too blessed to be stressed!
So let’s think like it, speak like it and act like it – in fact, live like it!**

How beautiful the hands that served the wine and the bread and the sons of the earth
How beautiful the feet that walked the long dusty roads and the hill to the cross
How beautiful, how beautiful, how beautiful is the body of Christ

How beautiful the heart that bled, that took all my sin and bore it instead
How beautiful the tender eyes, that chose to forgive and never despise

And as He laid down His life, we offer this sacrifice
That we will live just as he died, willing to pay the price willing to pay the price

How beautiful the radiant bride who waits for her groom with His light in her eyes
How beautiful when humble hearts give the fruit of pure lives so that others may live

How beautiful the feet that bring the sound of good news and the love of the King
How beautiful the hands that serve the wine and the bread and the sons of the earth

Sunday 11th August 2013 Ps.118:1-16 Jn.1:28f

God most High is also God most Nigh: *I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit.*^{Is.57:15} Heaven's door is now open: *I saw a door standing open in heaven.*^{Rev.4:1} Because God has come to us, we don't have to go to heaven to find Him: *But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*^{Rom.10:6-9}

For many people heaven seems a distant place where God lives detached from their everyday life here on earth. For them life is fraught with difficulties and endless worries with no clear way through them. They "pray" to a "god" who they don't believe in and then blame him when their circumstances don't improve! **They long for a heaven that is open, accessible and where they can get help in their time of need.**^{Heb.4:16} Instead for them *heaven is like iron*^{Lev.26:19} and they feel cursed to live out their lives in frustration and heartache, never reaching their full potential. This is nothing new and many people in the Bible times felt this way. Actually, under the OT Law of Moses, God had promised life would be like that if the people turned their backs on Him: *But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.*^{Lev.26:14-20; Dent.28:23}

It was against this background that Jesus came, offering relief and hope as He proclaimed that God's Kingdom had now come. *I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.*^{Jn.1:51} This was reminiscent of when Jacob realised that there was access to God: *In a dream [Jacob] 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... all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go... I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you."* Jacob was afraid. He said, "How holy this place is! This must be the house of God. This is the gate of heaven."^{Gen.28:12-17}

It was only after Nathanael had declared to Jesus "you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel"^{Jn.1:49} that Jesus said he would *see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man.*^{Jn.1:51} Only "in Christ" are God's promises are ours: *For no matter how many*

promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.^{2Cor.1:20} (See last week’s message.) And to really believe that that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God^{Matt.16:16} is not head knowledge but heart knowledge - revelation from God: *You are blessed... because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.*^{Matt.16:17} When we acknowledge that **Jesus is God’s Son, the Christ**, we too, like Nathaniel, will see heaven open.

When Peter made the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God^{Matt.16:16} Jesus said to him: *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.*^{Matt.16:18} Jesus is the Door/Gate^{Jn.10:9} and so the “*keys of the kingdom*” (the way to “unlock” God’s Kingdom) is **preaching that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.**^{Matt.16:16} This is what Peter did at the birth of the Church: *Then Peter stood up... In a loud voice he spoke to the crowd... “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*^{Acts 2:1-38} Contrast this with the Pharisees who knew about God’s Kingdom from the Scriptures but kept the people out: *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.*^{Matt.23:13}

When Jesus came He opened the way to God. So let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.^{Heb.4:16}

Although Jesus has not guaranteed to answer our prayers in the way we would like, **He has guaranteed to hear every prayer!** This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.^{1Jn.5:14-15}

We must have the humility to trust God to do the best for us, even if we can’t see how or understand why things are happening because God has promised to make everything work out for His glory and our ultimate good: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*^{Rom.8:28} This is what Jesus taught about living in His Kingdom: *And don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don’t worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need. So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.*^{Lk.12:29-32}

When John saw a door standing open in heaven,^{Rev.4:1} he saw Jesus in His ascended glory as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, [who] has triumphed; ...a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne.^{Rev.5:5-6} Jesus is the centre and focus of heaven’s activity and the angels who are going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth^{Jn.1:51} are bringing heaven’s values and “atmosphere” to Believers – to you and me. Christianity is not a matter of rules and regulations but a regenerated heart which desires to honour Jesus by living as He lived – honouring His Father: [The Father] has given the Son absolute authority to judge, so that everyone will honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son is certainly not honouring the Father who sent him.^{Jn.5:22-23} The people retorted, “You Samaritan devil! Didn’t we say all along that you were possessed by a demon?” “No,” Jesus said, “I have no demon in me. For I honour my Father—and you dishonour me. And though I have no wish to glorify myself, God is going to glorify me. He is the true judge. I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die.”^{Jn.8:48-51} God honoured Jesus when He commended Him: *At that moment heaven was opened. Jesus saw the Spirit of God coming down on him like a dove. A voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, and I love him. I am very pleased with*

him.^{»Matt.3:16-17} God also honours us when we serve Jesus and are faithful: *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.*^{Jn.12:26} *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!*^{»Matt.25:23} Being faithful means that we keep making the right choices and doing the right things by training ourselves (not others!). By making a habit of discerning right from wrong we eventually do it naturally and without thinking: *But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*^{Heb.5:14}

Do you see God in heaven as distant and detached or do you “see a door standing open in heaven”^{»Rev.4:1} ? Let’s take God seriously and make heaven’s values our values and enjoy heaven’s “atmosphere” here on earth: *Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Those blessings come from the heavenly world. They belong to us because we belong to Christ.*^{Eph.1:3} *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.*^{Col.3:1-2}

Sunday 18th August 2013 Ps.118:14-29 Jn.2

The last is best and blest! *You have saved the best till now*^{Jn.2:10}

Matthew’s, Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels are called the “**Synoptic Gospels**” because they include many of the same stories and often in the same sequence, whereas John’s Gospel, which was written later, contains many events the others haven’t included. Matthew presents Jesus as the **Messiah** fulfilling the OT prophecies; Mark presents Jesus as the **Servant** doing God’s Will; Luke presents Jesus as a **Perfect man**. He wrote a careful account ...so [we] can be certain of the truth of everything [we] were taught^{Lk.1:3-4} and as the only author of the NT Scriptures who was not a Jew, he often includes Jesus’ encounters with other non-Jews. These distinctive themes are useful in helping us remember which Gospel an event is recorded. John’s Gospel is sometimes called the “**signs Gospel**” because he emphasises the miraculous signs that Jesus performed. *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.*^{Jn.20:30-31} John included the story of the *Wedding in Cana* because he wanted to establish the theme of his Gospel: *life by the power of Jesus name*^{Jn.20:30-31} and overturn centuries of tradition that was now obsolete.

Throughout the Bible, God is revealed as a holy God who is clean, pure and righteous: *For I [am] the LORD... Therefore, you must be holy because I am holy.*^{Lev.11:45} *The only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honour and power to him forever! Amen.*^{1Tim.6:15-16} Jesus was (and is) the Son of God, so clearly He has the same characteristics as His Father: *He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone.*^{1Pet.2:22} God’s plan is that we become like Jesus: *And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*^{2Cor.3:18} *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} *When that time comes, no guilt will be found in Israel. No sin will be found in Judah. For I will forgive those of them I have allowed to survive. I, the LORD, affirm it!*^{Jer.50:20}

Under the OT people could only approach the holy God after they had performed

certain rituals to make them ceremoniously clean: *The persons being purified must then wash their clothes, shave off all their hair, and bathe themselves in water. Then they will be ceremonially clean.*^{Lev.14:8} In all future generations, if any of your descendants is ceremonially unclean when he approaches the sacred offerings that the people of Israel consecrate to the LORD, he must be cut off from my presence. I am the LORD.^{Lev.22:3} Later, ceremonial washing of hands and utensils became common practice: *The Jews, especially the Pharisees, do not eat until they have poured water over their cupped hands, as required by their ancient traditions. Similarly, they don't eat anything from the market until they immerse their hands in water. This is but one of many traditions they have clung to—such as their ceremonial washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles.*^{Mk.7:3-4} These washing rituals are still performed today by Jews and Muslims. There are even some liturgical churches who perform ceremonial rituals of sprinkling “holy” water to make people “ceremonially clean”! At the wedding in Cana the guests would have washed their hands to keep themselves ceremonially clean. Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” ...When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, ...he called the bridegroom over. “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”^{Jn.2:6-10} Jesus intentionally used these ceremonial jars for the *miraculous sign* of producing wine, to show that **true cleansing** does not come from without by washing with water but **comes from within** by “drinking” the “New Wine”. **We need cleansing from within not from without!** No amount of washing will make us “clean” or holy because “uncleanness” is internal not external: “Don't you understand?” Jesus asked. “Don't you see? Nothing that enters people from the outside can make them ‘unclean.’ It doesn't go into the heart. It goes into the stomach. Then it goes out of the body.” In saying this, Jesus was calling all foods “clean.” He went on to say, “What comes out of people makes them ‘unclean.’ Evil thoughts come from the inside, from people's hearts. So do sexual sins, stealing and murder. Adultery, greed, hate and cheating come from people's hearts too. So do desires that are not pure, and wanting what belongs to others. And so do telling lies about others and being proud and being foolish. All those evil things come from inside a person. They make him ‘unclean.’”^{Mk.7:18-23}

God's new way of true “cleanness” is by trusting in the results of Jesus' death:

Therefore, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.^{Heb.10:19-22}

The OT ceremonies were elaborate illustrations to show God's holiness and our need to be clean but they were temporary: *The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.*^{Heb.9:8-10} Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so.

^{Heb.13:9} Ceremonial washing can never make anyone holy (pure or clean). If our spirit (heart) is clean, then our whole person is also clean: *First clean the inside of the cup and dish. Then the outside will also be clean.*^{Matt.23:24} but if our heart is not right, we are not clean however much we wash: *But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart. Those are the things that make you ‘unclean.’*^{Matt.15:18}

When Jesus changed the water into wine, He was setting the scene for His ministry of

the New Covenant: *he took a cup of wine ... and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which seals the new covenant between God and his people. It is poured out to forgive the sins of many."*^{Matt.26:27-28} There is no longer any role for rituals to cover our sin **but when we "drink" Jesus blood** (i.e. personally accept the facts, and receive benefits of, Jesus' death) **our sins are forgiven – they are taken away**^{Jn.1:29} not "atoned for" (which means "covered up"). Jesus said that *repentance and remission (forgiveness) of sins should be preached in His name to all nations.*^{Lk.24:47} The word "**remission**" literally means **dismissal** and is also translated "**freedom**" and "**release**": *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.*^{Lk.4:18} **Yes! Under the New Covenant our sins are removed, sent away from us and dismissed by the blood of Jesus!** However people still prefer the "old wine" the performance of the rituals of religion which are pictures of God's plan of redemption. They still prefer religion by proxy - the "priest" (or Pastor!) to mediate between them and God and to say prayers for them! *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The new wine would burst the old skins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine must be put into new wineskins. But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the fresh and the new. 'The old is better,' they say.*^{Lk.5:37-39} **It might make people feel better to undergo useless rituals but they don't work!** *God, who knows people's hearts... also cleansed their hearts through faith. Why are you now questioning God's way by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, through the grace of the Lord Jesus.*^{Acts 15:9-11} **The old way is finished:** *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.*^{Heb.8:13} *The old rule is done away with. It was weak and useless. The law didn't make anything perfect.*^{Heb.7:18-19} **But Jesus' Blood** (the effects of Jesus' death and resurrection) **does work:** *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, [or 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.*^{Heb.9:14-15} What was true of Jesus' wine at the wedding: *you have saved the best till now*^{Jn.2:10} is also true of Jesus' "new wine" of the New Covenant **and it is not only good - it is the best and it is blest!**

Sunday 25th August 2013 Ps. 119:1-8 Dave Smethurst

Dave Smethurst is preaching this Sunday, so I have used these articles instead of Sermon notes.

Devotion Rather than Devotions

I know that nourishing our relationship with God is an important part of cultivating sensible faith. But one way of pursuing that—having a daily "quiet time"—has always been difficult for me. Maybe it's been hard for you, too. So I have a recommendation. Instead of trying (unsuccessfully) to have devotions every morning, I have devotion. That is, I take five to ten minutes early in the day to focus on God—not to get something from Him, but to actively devote myself to Him for the day. After I sing a hymn or two, I use a biblical prayer as a guide to express my dedication to the Lord.

Devotion (in the sense I'm using the word) is different from "**devotions**." My goal isn't to squeeze a sense of well-being out of the encounter, but to focus entirely on Him, worshipping Him, thanking Him and devoting myself to His purposes for the day. The

focus is entirely on God, not on my feelings, surrendering myself to the Father, no matter how I feel nor what befalls me. It's fairly brief by design, but still very meaningful.

My moments of devotion may develop into a longer prayer time, but they don't have to. Instead, no matter what my schedule is, I can start each day devoted to Christ, then anticipate time for regular prayer and supplication later in the day by scheduling it or squeezing it in using the methods I shared with you yesterday.

It's a simple thing: Devotion rather than devotions.

A Little Lesson on Prayer

Prayer is mysterious in many ways, yet we must never stop praying.

Recently I spent 4 days speaking in Alaska but instead of enjoying God's beautiful country, I was trying to survive a severe case of the flu. The experience got me thinking about prayer. During the trip, the church I was working with was praying fervently for my health. Family and friends back home were praying. There were probably 100, maybe even 200 people praying for my short-term health, so I could complete my ministry work. Did God answer their prayers? I have two reflections:

(1) **Our knowledge of how God answers prayer is very limited.** Did God heal me completely? No. It took me an entire week to largely recover. Did God answer (in the affirmative) the prayers whatsoever? I don't know. How could I? Maybe God kept me from getting any sicker. Maybe he ensured that I would have enough strength to make it through the teaching times. Maybe he wanted me to struggle physically for a short while. I don't know. That God hears and answers prayers is clear (*Matt.7:7-11;21:22; Mk.11:24; Jn.14:13-14, etc.*). How He answers prayers is not.

(2) **Prayer is not merely a means to an end but an end in itself.** Even if God granted no grace to me physically, were all the prayers in vain? I don't think so. **The very act of prayer is an admission of dependence.** Prayer says, *"I can't do this without you."* The more one prays, the more one gets in touch with the truth of our utter need for God. I'm reminded of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* For Jesus, an affirmative answer to his request is not the final end. Rather, it's submission to God's will. And prayer seems to be part and parcel of that process. Ultimately, voluntary submission requires trust. I will only submit to whom I trust. So then, prayer is an act of trust in God and is an end in itself. And thus, no prayer is in vain.

The "what" and "how" of prayer is mysterious in many ways. Yet we must never stop praying.

Having Trouble Praying?

Do you feel unmotivated or hopeless when it comes to prayer? Do you feel spiritually dead? God is the God who gives life where it doesn't now exist. I have no doubt that some of you are right now sheepishly reflecting on the fact that you're not very big on prayer. Perhaps you're even defiantly resisting prayer, or maybe you're merely depressed and unable to motivate yourself to pray when you've faced so many disappointments and feel so far away from God. Or maybe you're like me, and you've been in each of these places at one time or another.

I want to say a word of encouragement to those who are having trouble praying. **First, the greatest killer of prayer is a loss of hope.** A turning point for me when I was feeling most hopeless happened when I was reading Romans 4. In this chapter, Paul is

explaining that if we share in the faith of Abraham, we're the descendants of Abraham and heirs of the promises made to him. Then Paul hits us with a description of God that changes everything: "*Him whom [Abraham] believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.*"

Meditate on that for a moment. **God "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist."** God has the power to give your spirit the life and hope that is now lacking in you—He calls it into being out of nothing. Do you feel dead? **God is the God who gives life where it does not now exist.** This is who God is. This is what He does. But He doesn't always do this immediately. Do you have the faith to trust in Him while waiting as Abraham waited? *Without becoming weak in faith [Abraham] contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.*^{Rom.4:18-21}

It's likely that an end to your hopelessness, leading to an ability to pray again, seems impossible to you—just as impossible as the birth of Isaac seemed to Abraham. So, like Abraham, don't try to focus all your faith on this happening. Instead, **focus your faith on God**, trustworthy and powerful, who gives life to the dead. Meditate on who He is. Don't worry if you don't believe you'll ever have hope again. **Just start by believing the truth about God.** Like Abraham, "*in hope against hope*" put your faith in Him who is able to call into being that which does not exist.

Second, your soul is real. There are spiritual realities in life just as there are physical realities. If there's one thing I've learned, it's that my soul can starve just as surely as my body can starve. **You need to pray and read the Bible as much as you need to eat** because there is the same reality of necessity in both cases. Do you place as much urgency on the one as on the other? Do you ever decide not to eat for a few days because you're too busy? Is your soul suffering now the way your body would be if you stopped eating? **The answer to your apathy or despair might be as simple as beginning to eat again.**

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A Biblical Understanding Needed

Let's return to worshipping God simply for who He is. Let's pray to Him not to coerce Him, but to commune with Him. Let's proclaim a Gospel that promotes the centrality of Christ and His finished work on the Cross- validated by His resurrection, sealed by Pentecost, and vindicated by His parousia (return).

*Andrew Corbett, "How Christians can be superstitious" April 2006 www.andrewcorbett.net
(also available from our website under: What We Teach/ Resources)*

Wee Willie Winkie

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

September

God the Healer: *"He himself bore our sins" in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by His wounds you have been healed."* ^{1Pet.2:24}

Sunday 1st September 2013 Ps.119:9-16 John 3

Do you need to be "Born Again" to go to heaven?

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." ^{Jn.3:3}

The Maccabean Revolt (around 160BC) ended the Seleucid (Greek) domination of Israel. Their leader, Judas Maccabeus, ritually cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem, re-established traditional Jewish worship there and installed his brother Jonathan Maccabeus as high priest. (The Jewish feast of *Hanukkah* ("Dedication") commemorates Maccabeus' restoration of Jewish worship at the Jerusalem temple.) It was in this surge of patriotic and religious fervour that the Sadducees and Pharisees emerged. The Sadducees were mainly the priestly and aristocratic families whilst the Pharisees mainly represented the poorer people. Conflict between them soon developed over class, culture, rituals and interpretation of the Law. Initially the Pharisees were concerned about keeping themselves distinctly Jewish rather than absorbing the Greek culture and also keeping the Torah (Law of Moses). This developed into different interpretations of the Torah and how to apply it to current Jewish life, with the Sadducees recognizing only the Written Torah and rejecting the Oral Torah and doctrines such as the Resurrection of the Dead. ^{Acts 23:7-8} The Pharisees' religion was meticulously legalistic to the point of absurdity but the Sadducees were liberal and discounted any involvement of God in their lives. There was also another group called the Essenes. These lived communally and were dedicated to asceticism, voluntary poverty, daily immersion, and abstinence from worldly pleasures, often including celibacy. These 3 groups or Sects were spiritually "dead" and their religion was devoid of any trust in God but God always had a remnant – a people who knew Him and loved Him. These same errors are seen in the Church today but there is still a remnant today of faithful people whose religion is pure: *It is the same today, for a few of the people of Israel have remained faithful because of God's grace—his undeserved kindness in choosing them. And since it is through God's kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God's grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved. So this is the situation: Most of the people of Israel have not found the favour of God they are looking for so earnestly. A few have—the ones God has chosen—but the hearts of the rest were hardened.* ^{Rom.11:5-7}

Nicodemus was Pharisee but also one of the "remnant" who was genuine and His encounter with Jesus brought him into the Kingdom of God. Note that Jesus did not say to him that he was a good man, a pious person or a religious leader and so he was alright. Jesus told him: *unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.* ^{Jn.3:3} Initially this was a mystery to Nicodemus because he was "blind" to spiritual matters but when Jesus explained further, Nicodemus believed. *"Is there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in [Jesus]? This foolish crowd follows him, but they are ignorant of the law. God's curse is on them!"* Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. *"Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?"* he asked. They replied, *"Are you from Galilee, too? Search the Scriptures and see for yourself—no prophet ever comes from Galilee!"* ^{Jn.7:48-52} Later Joseph asked Pilate for Jesus' body. Joseph was from the town of Arimathea. He was a follower of Jesus. But he followed Jesus secretly because he was afraid of the Jews. After Pilate gave him permission, Joseph came and took the body away. Nicodemus went with Joseph. He was the man who had earlier visited Jesus at night.

Nicodemus brought some mixed spices, about 75 pounds. The two men took Jesus' body. They wrapped it in strips of linen cloth, along with the spices. That was the way the Jews buried people's bodies.^{Jn.19:38-40}

To believe that God exists is not faith but merely believing the facts. Even devils do that: *My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people claim they have faith but don't act like it? Can that kind of faith save them? ...If it doesn't cause us to do something, it's dead. But someone will say, "You have faith. I do good works." Show me your faith that doesn't do good works. And I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that. And they tremble! You foolish man! Do you want proof that faith without good works is useless? Our father Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar. Wasn't he considered to be right with God because of what he did? So you see that what he believed and what he did were working together. What he did made his faith complete.*^{Jas.2:14-22}

We should take time to assure ourselves that we are real Believers who trust God implicitly because we know that Christ resides in us: *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?*^{2Cor.13:5} A mental ascent to Christianity is good but if faith is not real our religion is merely a big deception. **We must also believe that God rewards us – that God responds to our trust in Him by accepting us:** *Without faith it isn't possible to please God. Those who come to God must believe that he exists. And they must believe that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.*^{Heb.11:6} Paul argued that Jesus' resurrection was pivotal to our faith and assured us that Christ has been raised and so our faith is not in vain: *We have preached that Christ has been raised from the dead... if Christ has not been raised, what we preach doesn't mean anything. Your faith doesn't mean anything either. More than that, we would be lying about God... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith doesn't mean anything. Your sins have not been forgiven... Do we have hope in Christ only for this life? Then people should pity us more than anyone else. But Christ really has been raised from the dead.*^{1Cor.15:12-20}

We are expected to build ourselves up in our most holy faith^{Jude 1:20} **but this mostly comes from the right attitude to difficult experiences:** *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles 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.*^{Jas.1:2-4} Another version puts it this way: *You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colours.* **Life's difficulties prove and strengthen our faith:** *So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to 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.*^{1Pet.1:6-7}

Christianity is credible because our faith is built on the evidence that God exists and what He has said is true. What we believe is not “un-believable” and our faith is not “blind” or a “leap in the dark”. **Faith is trust in God based on His Character** (what He has done) **and His Word** (what He has said as recorded in the Scriptures). But faith is more than just agreeing with the facts – **faith is a revelation from God that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.**^{Matt.16:16-17} This revelation is a spiritual activity – an activity in our spirit by God's Holy Spirit. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is invisible to our natural eyes but we can see the result of both the wind's and the Holy Spirit's activity: *Jesus replied, "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.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit." ^{Jn.3:5-8} *You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act... Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.* ^{Matt.7:16-20}

Although revelation (and consequently faith) is initiated by God, we must respond and build on that revelation. **Revelation comes from reflection – from thinking or meditating on what God has said especially in the Scriptures:** *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.* ^{2Tim.2:7} God has promised to receive all who come to Him, which includes you and me: *As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* ^{Rom.10:11-13} This "calling on the name of the Lord" is what Jesus meant by "you must be born again". ^{Jn.3:7} Being "born again" is not only necessary to go to heaven but is also necessary to "see the Kingdom of God" (which is the reign of Christ in our life right now). **Let's make sure that, like Nicodemus, our response is belief rather than unbelief like the other Pharisees who rejected the evidence, and with it, eternal life.**

Sunday 8th September 2013 Ps.119:17-24 John 3

What God has done for me, He can do for you - this is my Testimony!

Peace and prosperity to you! I want you all to know about the miraculous signs and wonders the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how powerful his wonders! His kingdom will last forever, his rule through all generations. ^{Dan.4:1-3}

Last week I made the point that what we believe is not "un-believable" and our faith is not "blind" or a "leap in the dark". **Christianity is credible because our faith is built on the evidence that God exists and what He has said is true.** But Christianity also involves a dimension beyond the physical – a spiritual dimension. Everything about life shouts loud and clear that we are more than the body we live in. When the cells of our body are renewed, we don't change – we stay the same person. Our real self is not our body but our soul or personality. A person may have a "disabled" body or have parts of their body missing but they are still a whole person because they are not their body – they only live in their body. We are spirit, have a soul and live in a body: *Now may God himself, the God of peace, make you pure, belonging only to him. May your whole self—spirit, soul, and body—be kept safe and without fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes. You can trust the One who calls you to do that for you.* ^{1Thes.5:23-24} *God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* ^{Gen.2:7} Our soul has a conscience and a sense of right and wrong even if we are not Christians: *Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.* ^{Rom.2:14-16}

God is Spirit ^{Jn.4:24} and we are made in His image: *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness... So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them."* ^{Gen.1:26-27} Yet there is something about life and about God that remains a mystery: *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.* ^{Ecc.3:11} There is a greatness about God that is beyond words - *inexpressibly magnificent* - or as the hymn-writer puts it: "ineffably sublime".

Crown Him the Lord of years, the Potentate of time, Creator of the rolling spheres, ineffably sublime. All hail, Redeemer, hail! For You have died for me; Your praise and glory shall not fail throughout eternity. Just as we know that life is real even though it is not “physical” and cannot be proven by an empirical activity of science, so God is real yet remains a “mystery” - i.e. something that is not easily explained. Perhaps the greatest mystery is that God makes His home within a Christian and possesses them: “Christianity is 100% supernatural – God possessing man”.^{J.G.Lake} Christ actually lives in us Believers: *God has chosen to make known the glorious riches of that mystery... And here is what it is. Christ is in you. He is your hope of glory.*^{Col.1:27}

Knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ is eternal life ^{Jn.17:3} but “outsiders” don’t understand this until they become “insiders”. *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.*^{1Cor.2:14} But knowing God is not restricted to the privileged “insiders” as if a “secret society” because like our NHS, the Gospel is “free at the point of need”!

The mystery is that people who have never heard of God and those who have heard of him all their lives (what I've been calling outsiders and insiders) stand on the same ground before God. They get the same offer, same help, same promises in Christ Jesus. The Message is accessible and welcoming to everyone, across the board.^{Eph.3:6} Basically, all of us, whether insiders or outsiders, start out in identical conditions, which is to say that we all start out as sinners. Scripture leaves no doubt about it: *There's nobody living right, not even one.*^{Rom.3:9-10} Access into this “spiritual dimension” of knowing God is by turning to Jesus Christ: *But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day ...the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ... But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*^{2Cor.3:14-17}

However just because God is *Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes*, and “ineffably sublime” it doesn’t mean that we can’t give a credible explanation about Him. Our Testimony (what we know about God) is not only our personal story but it is also part of Jesus’ commission to us. *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*^{Acts.1:8} The more we testify to what God has done for us, the more effective our testimony becomes: *that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*^{Philemon.1:6} When God intervenes in our life it is natural and easy to witness about Him because we want to talk about God’s love - after all who can keep quiet when God personally gives us a miraculous healing or provision! These interventions by God make us excited about going to Church, excited about sharing our faith, excited about growing in faith and excited about Him who obviously loves us so much. When God intervenes in our life, it is sign of God’s love that other people must see. *We are guides into God's most sublime secrets, not security guards posted to protect them.*^{1Cor.4:1} God freely loves us and has promised to graciously give us all things.^{Rom.8:32} Miraculous interventions by God are tokens of His love; they make us ‘feel good’ about our self and they make us ‘feel good’ about God too! The assurance that God is personally interested in us and loves us builds our faith and increases our self-value. However miracles are not signs of maturity or perfection – they are a display of God’s glory and love and so we don’t have to be perfect before God will shower us with ‘tokens of His love’.

What God has done for me, means that He can also do it for you! Telling others what God has done for us is our testimony to God's grace and love. *"Each miracle healing becomes undeniable proof that the Gospel is indeed true?"* ^{T.L. Osborn} But we should never forget **God's testimony that Jesus is the Son of God** because that is the most powerful and accurate testimony of all: *but [Jesus] has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words.* ^{Jn. 3:31-34}

Lord, Liar, or Lunatic? *Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit on Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.* ^{C.S. Lewis}

Jesus' testimony is backed up by His Deity (Spirit), His Humanity (Water) and His Death on the Cross (Blood): *And Jesus Christ was revealed as God's Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross—not by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit, who is truth, confirms it with his testimony. So we have these three witnesses—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and all three agree. Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son. All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life.* ^{1Jn. 5:6-12}

Our greatest testimony is sharing how we were saved from our sins because the greatest miracle is to be saved from our sins. This is the reason Jesus came to us: *Joseph... the child within [Mary] was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.* ^{Matt. 1:20-21} Christianity is not about having a long, happy and prosperous life or living comfortably but being saved from our sins.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God... For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. ^{Rom. 5:1-11} **Like John, let's keep focused on Jesus and stay humble:** *[Jesus] must become more important. I must become less important.* ^{Jn. 3:30}

Sunday 15th September Ps.119: 25-32 John 4

How big is your appetite?

There is a close connection between exertion and energy. It is normal to feel hungry after carrying out strenuous work because it is nature's way of encouraging us to replenish the energy we have used up. Fatigue can lead to exhaustion if we don't sustain ourselves but if we consume more calories than we use up, we store the energy in our body and *"put on weight"*! ^{c.f. Jdg. 3:12-30}

Jesus taught by example and by action often using everyday events to teach about God's Kingdom. When Jesus was *tired from the long walk, [He] sat wearily beside the well* ^{Jn. 4:6} and used the opportunity to teach His Disciples about spiritual food: *My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work.* ^{Jn. 4:34} He was explaining the

Kingdom principle that spiritual nourishment is more important than physical nourishment. *I have a kind of food you know nothing about.*^{Jn.4:32} The spirit is more important than the soul and the Word is more powerful than the world. *My son, pay attention to what I say. Listen closely to my words. Don't let them out of your sight. Keep them in your heart. They are life to those who find them. They are health to your whole body.*^{Pron.4:20-22} Therefore God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.^{Phil.2:9} For you have exalted above all things your name and your word.^{Ps.138:2}

The only salvation “work” that God requires from us is to believe in His Son Jesus Christ: *But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval.*” They replied, “We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?” Jesus told them, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.”^{Jn.6:27-29} This “work” will build an appetite for “spiritual food” which is not prayer, or praise, or even just reading the Bible but God’s Word (who is Jesus) and obedience to His Word: *It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*^{Matt.4:4} The “spiritual food” that will sustain us is the act of doing what God says – heart knowledge rather than only head knowledge: *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man.*^{Matt.7:24} Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says... they will be blessed in what they do.^{Jas.1:21-25}

Doing God’s will was Jesus’ priority and should be ours: *Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me... Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.’*^{Heb.10:5-7} My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.^{Matt.26:42} Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.^{Matt.6:9-10} God’s Will is that we *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation*^{Mk.16:15} because He doesn’t want any to perish: *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.*^{2Pet.3:9}

To enjoy work is a blessing: *I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.*^{Ecc.3:12-14}

Doing God’s Will involves Preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ (witnessing by what we say) **and Practicing** the Good News of Jesus Christ (witnessing by how we live) and both these aspects of doing God’s Will are equally important: *Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?*^{Jas.2:17} For the Believer there is no secular/sacred divide^{Zech.14:20-21} because everything we do is “spiritual” now that we live for Christ and serve Him: *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain... Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*^{Phil.1:21-27} And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.^{Col.3:17} Servants, do what you're told by your earthly masters. And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ. The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being Christian doesn't cover up bad work.^{Col.3:22-25}

Harvest is the culmination of a year's work and there is great joy when it is successfully completed. Jesus said that people are like the grain that is ready to harvest: *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!*^{Jn.4:35} In another story, Jesus described the word of God as the seed that produces a good harvest: *The seed is God's word... and the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God's word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest.*^{Lk.8:11-15} **We must “believe and behave” that is “practice what we preach”** or we will be no different from the hypocrites of Jesus' day: *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for people to see... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to... on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.*^{Matt.23:2-28}

God has established the principle of Seedtime and Harvest^{Gen.8:22} and promised that we will reap a harvest if we don't give up: *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*^{Gal.6:7-10}

We are to have a “Kingdom” mind-set of working together with others and reaping together with them. To live in isolation from other believers is to deny the Body of Christ and dishonouring to God and other Believers. *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.*^{Jn.4:36-38}

How good is your appetite? Let's build up our spiritual appetite by “working” hard (believing God and staying faithful – full of faith) and doing God's Will in word and deed. Then 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!*^{Matt.25:23}

*How precious, O Lord, is Your unfailing love; we find refuge in the shadow of Your wings
We feast, Lord Jesus, on the abundance of Your house and drink from Your river of delights.
With You is the fountain of life, in Your light we see light.*^{Psalms 36:7-9}

Sunday 22nd September Ps.119: 33-40 John 4

Two lives and two deaths - Die once and live twice or live once and die twice!

This sounds like another James Bond film in the same vein as “You Only Live Twice”, “Live and let die” or “Die another day”!

“You only live once!” or do you?

‘I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.’^{Jn.5:24} Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again. This will happen when people are raised from the dead on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection

and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even if he dies. And those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. I believe that you are the One who was supposed to come into the world."^{Jn.11:23-27}

The Resurrection is the glorious Hope (certainty) of Believers

There are 2 Resurrections (Spiritual and Physical) and 2 Deaths (Physical and Spiritual)

The 1st resurrection is spiritual Conversion and the 2nd resurrection is at the end of time. The 1st death is the end of our physical life but the 2nd death is eternity without God. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him ^{Rev.20:6} 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. The Father has life in himself. He has also allowed the Son to have life in himself. And the Father has given him the authority to judge. This is because he is the Son of Man. 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. I can do nothing by myself. I judge only as I hear. And my judging is fair. I do not try to please myself. I try only to please the One who sent me. ^{Jn.5:24-30}

We are Foursquare Gospel people who proclaim Jesus Christ as the Coming King as well as Saviour, Baptizer, and Healer.

Jesus came as a Shepherd^{Jn.10:14} but will come as a King^{Rev.19:16} - He came on a donkey^{Matt.21} but will come on a horse^{Rev.19:11} - He came in peace^{Lk.19:42; Jn.14:27} but will come in judgement.^{1Pet.4:5; Jude1:15}

Judgement. Many schools get their students to take the exams early so if they get poor results or fail they can retake them without falling behind. Christians have already taken their life's "exams" and failed! We were judged and found guilty by God who then forgave us everything and gave us "top marks". Now we never have to worry about our "end of life" exams because we know we have "passed". The non-Christian still have to take their "end of life" exam and they will fail with no chance to re-take it. This is really serious and it certainly is worth asking people to consider the matter before it is too late.

For the Believer:

judgment that is past is our confidence;

judgment that is future is our consolation;

judgement that is present is our security.

Mercy triumphs over judgment.^{James 2:13} There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment.^{1John 4:18}

Past Judgment: We were judged and found guilty by God who then forgave us everything. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. ^{Is.53:4-5} **There is now no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus.** ^{Rom.8:1}

Present Judgment: God disciplines^{Heb.12:4-11} not condemns.^{Jn.3:17} God is not the source of our problems, our bad choices are. Yes, He has the power to stop them, but He will not override the human will. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. But

when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.^{1Cor.11:31-32}

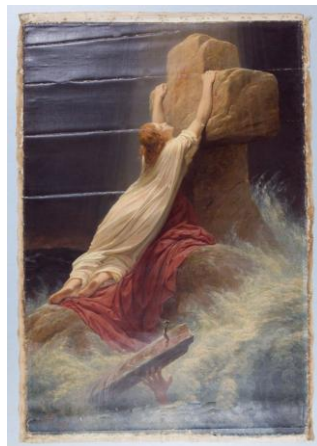
Future Judgment: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*^{2Cor.5:10}

Salvation is not based on what we have done, but on what Jesus did for us. Man is not “unsaved” because of what he has done, but because of what he has not done - he has not received Jesus Christ. The believer has nothing to fear concerning this judgment of eternal punishment because God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.^{1Thess.5:9}

It is because of Jesus that we are saved from the wrath of God. *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.*^{Rom.5:9} *and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.*^{1Thess.1:10}

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him.^{Rev.20:6}

What use is a SALVATION which does not make me SAFE, or an ASSURANCE of which I cannot be SURE?



The Rock of Ages by Johannes Adam Simon Oertel (1876)

We used to hold meetings in the cottage of old Mrs. B. Over her fireplace was a picture entitled ‘Rock of Ages’ representing a white-robed girl with hair hanging down her back. She was soaked with water, and clinging to a rock in the shape of a cross, while her feet still dangled beneath her in the wild waves. There was a threatening background of rough sea and stormy sky.

The old lady was very proud of this picture and would refer to it as she exhorted her hearers to cling to the Cross. Much of her Christian life was directed to keeping herself saved – “*hanging on*” - as she expressed it.

One evening, we went for the weekly cottage meeting in her house and found the picture gone. The faded wall-paper round the spot from which it had been taken showed that something was missing.

“*What has happened to your picture, Mrs. B?*” we asked. “*I’ve smashed it*” she said most emphatically. “*Many’s the time I’ve looked at that poor girl hanging on, till it fairly made my arms ache for her. One slip and she would have been back beneath the waves, worse off than when she first fell into the sea.*”

'I've often wished there were something more secure than this 'hanging on' business. It seemed so risky with all those rocks, slippery with sea-weed. I'd like to have got the girl home, and given her a change of clothes and a good hot cup o' tea. "Today I was reading in First Peter chapter one, and when I came to the fifth verse: 'Kept by the power of God, through faith' I thought to myself, 'The Lord Jesus is the Author and Finisher of my faith.'^{Heb.12:2} Even the believing is 'Not for yourselves, lest any man should boast.'^{Eph.2:8} It's the gift of God. "I felt so safe with those Everlasting Arms underneath me, that when I looked up at the poor girl clinging there, it dawned on me suddenly— That picture is untrue. I'm not half in and half out. I'm saved with an everlasting salvation - saved from head to foot, seven days a week, from now on and for evermore. I'm not hanging to slippery rocks. I'm TWENTY MILES INLAND! So I pulled down the old picture, smashed it over my knee and shouted Hallelujah!"

From the Prologue to [*Safe Eternally*](#) W.F.P. Burton (available in pdf format from our website)

For more on **Judgement** read Mike Petzer's booklet [*Forgiveness and Judgement*](#) (available from the Church website).

Sunday 29th September Ps.119: 41-48 John 6:1-40

Super Food

The feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle that Jesus performed that is recorded in all 4 Gospels so it is obviously an important event. Here, as in much of His ministry, Jesus did something practical to illustrate a spiritual principle or truth.

Food is essential to life and the lack of food will lead to weariness, weakness and eventually end in death. The people were on their way to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover - a journey of about 70 miles - which would take them about 3 - 4 days to walk so they would have had taken some provisions with them. But when they spent that time with Jesus they used up their provisions and became hungry. There could have been up to 20,000 people present if you count the women and children with the 5000 men. By feeding them all from a boy's picnic, Jesus was showing them that not only does God care and is more than able to provide, even in impossible situations, but that we should prioritise our values: *Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that [bread]. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last.*^{Jn.6:27}

After Jesus' baptism, He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days and during that time He ate nothing.^{Lk.4:1} When tempted to change stones into bread, Jesus resisted the devil by saying: No! *The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*^{Lk.4:4} Obviously Jesus was able to make bread from the stones or even from nothing but He never used His deity to His own advantage - this is an important principle for us to remember. *In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness... humbled himself by becoming obedient.*^{Phil.2:5-8}

We should never use our Faith to gain financially – the Kingdom of God is not about this world's wealth even though **godliness does bring its own gain**: *If anyone... does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They... have been robbed of the truth and think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into*

ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.^{1Tim.6:4-10}

God wants us to get our priorities right – 1st spirit, then soul and lastly body: *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.*^{1Thes.5:23-24}

It is our spirit that distinguishes us from animals. Animals have souls (i.e. life, personality and character) but it was only man that God breathed His life/spirit/breath into.^{Gen.2:7} Animals don't go to heaven when they die because they have no eternal spirit - it is only humans who live eternally. *Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart.*^{Ecc.3:11}

Animals have no moral code or a sense of right and wrong but only live for the “now” with their natural animal self-preservation instinct.

When people try to elevate animals to human level they only debase humans to animal level.

A natural consequence of the theory of evolution is that when you teach people that they came from animals they start to live like animals!

Peter warns against such people and describes the consequences of living like animals:

they are like animals that act without thinking, animals born to be caught and killed. And, like animals, these false teachers will be destroyed... They take pleasure in openly doing evil, so they are like dirty spots and stains among you. They delight in deceiving you... A place in the blackest darkness has been kept for them. They brag with words that mean nothing. By their evil desires they lead people into the trap of sin—people who are just beginning to escape from others who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are not free. They are slaves of things that will be destroyed. For people are slaves of anything that controls them.^{2Pet.2:12-19}

Every sickness, disease or death that we see should motivate us to *spend our energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give [us].*^{Jn.6:24}

None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death. There is no escaping that obligation, that dark battle.^{Ecc.8:8}

Everyone will die someday. Those who are still living should really think about that.^{Ecc.7:2} *Man will go to his dark home in the grave... Remember your Creator before you return to the dust you came from. That's when your spirit will go back to God who gave it.*^{Ecc.12:5-7}

We should enjoy our natural life but not at the expense of our spiritual life.

Our unique relationship with God is primarily to honour Him and then to introduce others to Him -

it is not for us to have an easy life.

We have a **BLESSED** life but it is not necessarily a comfortable life. Even Jesus learnt obedience through suffering: *Jesus was God's Son. But by suffering he learned what it means to obey. In that way he was made perfect.*^{Heb.5:8-9}

Jesus spent 3½ years teaching about the Kingdom of God and then opened it up to all of us when He ratified the New Covenant by His blood (death): *This is my blood of the new covenant. It is poured out to forgive the sins of many. From now on, I won't drink wine with you again until the day I drink it with you in my Father's kingdom.*^{Matt.26:28-29}

This **Kingdom** of God is **King Jesus' domain** (rule) in our lives which is the most **BLESSED** life anyone could ever experience.

It is not **freedom from** trouble or hard times or harm or hunger; ...nakedness or danger or war^{Rom.8:35} but **freedom in** those circumstances, knowing that *Nothing at all can ever separate us from God's love because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done.*^{Rom.8:39}

As Citizens of heaven, we automatically access the benefits of God's Kingdom which include peace and joy:

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.^{Phil.3:20-21}

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.^{Rom.14:17}

When Jesus said: *I am the bread that gives life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty,*^{Jn.6:35} He was making a comparison with the Manna that God gave the Israelites.^{Ex.16} Jesus, like the Manna, is always enough for everyone and so we will never go “hungry”. But, unlike the Manna, Jesus’ sustenance is within us and so we don’t have to “collect” it each morning! **This “food” of Jesus’ personal Presence with us, really is “super-food”** so never think of yourself as spiritually “hungry” or “thirsty” or “empty” because *Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God.*^{2Pet.1:3}

Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely and long for Heav'n and home?

When Jesus is my portion, my constant Friend is He:

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He cares for me;

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free,

For His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

“Let not your heart be troubled,” His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fear;
Though by the path He leads me but one step I may see:

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,

I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free:

His eye is on the sparrow and I know He cares for me;

October

God the Coming King: *Now to the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* ^{1Tim.1:17}

Sunday 6th October 2013 Ps.119:49-56

What to do when Trouble Comes.

Although Jesus said that **we will have trouble** He also said that **we should take heart**: *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart (be in good spirits, be cheerful)! I have overcome the world.* ^{Jn.16:33}

When trouble comes, remember these ABC's of "Do's" & "Don'ts"

ABC of "Don'ts"

1) Don't get Angry: Anger is an emotion and if not controlled will lead us into sin. *Anger is cruel, and wrath is like a flood, but jealousy is even more dangerous.* ^{Prov.27:4} There is a "righteous anger" or "angry indignation" that Jesus exhibited: *"Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. Jesus looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.* ^{Mk.3:4-5} But even "righteous anger" must be controlled or it can open the way for more problems: *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* ^{Eph.4:26-27} **Keep a sweet attitude:** Although God is angry toward sin, He is rich in love: *The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.* ^{Ps.145:8-9} We too must show the same compassion to others without compromising our holiness: *Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.* ^{Eph.4:2} Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, *lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.* ^{1Tim.2:8} 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. ^{Rom.15:5-6}

2) Don't Blame others especially God: God is always right because He is God but He is also good and can't be contaminated with evil: *You are good, and what you do is good;* ^{Ps.119:68} *God can't be tempted by evil. And he doesn't tempt anyone... Every good and perfect gift is from God. It comes down from the Father. He created the heavenly lights. He does not change like shadows that move.* ^{Jas.1:13-17} If we ever disagree with God we will always be in the wrong and that is sin: *Woe to (what sorrow awaits; how terrible it will be for) anyone who argues with his Maker!* ^{Is.45:9} We must be careful that we always say good things especially about God (which is praise): *Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name.* ^{Heb.13:15} *I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.* ^{Ps.34:1} *In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing... In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.* ^{Job.1:22; 2:10} *I said, "I will be careful about how I live. I will not sin by what I say. I will keep my mouth closed when sinful people are near me."* ^{Ps.39:1}

Blame brings bitterness which corrupts and defiles: *Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.* ^{Heb.12:15} *And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour. Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.* ^{Eph.4:30-32}

3) Don't Complain: Complaining is a criticism of God's handling of our situation and destroys contentment. *And do not complain, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So let the one who thinks he is standing be careful that he does not fall. No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.*^{1Cor.10:10-13} **Either Jesus is Lord of all or not Lord at all.** God never has an "off-day" neither does He sleep! *My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth! He will not let you stumble; the one who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps. The LORD himself watches over you!*^{Ps.121:2-5} **Groan but don't moan!** *Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door!*^{1as.5:9} *For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering.*^{Rom.8:22-23}

No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.^{E.Roosevelt}

ABC of "Do's"

1) Do Adore Jesus (Worship): To love God is the first call on our lives. Loving God means that we adore Him: we appreciate and enjoy Him, we take delight in Him and say good things about Him. Love involves our emotions as well as our will. *The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only LORD. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'*^{Mk.12:29-30} *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*^{1Cor.13:13} *You are my God, and I will praise you; You are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His mercy (love) endures forever.*^{Ps.118:28-29} Bad things happen to good people because life is unpredictable: *The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.*^{Ecc.9:11} Life's difficulties can make us or break us - we can either see them as stepping stones or stumbling blocks - it depends on our attitude. But whatever happens God can and will use them for His glory and our good: *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God.*^{Rom.8:28} **We are not told to give thanks for every situation BUT we should pray with thanksgiving in every situation:** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*^{Phil.4:6-7} *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*^{1Thes.5:16-18} Giving thanks to God honours Him and facilitates His solution to our situation: *He who sacrifices thank offerings honours me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.*^{Ps.50:23} **Adoration is not only the right thing to do - it is also the best thing to do as well!**

2) Do Believe Jesus (Trust): To believe God is to trust Him because we have total confidence in Him. This confidence is based on what we know of God and so the closer our relationship with God, the easier it is to trust Him - and the more we know God, the harder it is to not trust Him! Trust is not passive but active and is the basis of a happy and contented life: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*^{Rom.15:13}

Because God has never rescinded on any of His promises we can trust Him for our own situation today: *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*^{Ps.23:1} *Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled.*^{Josh.21:45} *Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.*^{1Kg.8:56}

3) Do Confess Jesus (Agree): In the Greek language “confession” is *homologos* [*homo* (same) and *logos* (word)] meaning *of one mind; to speak the same; to agree*. Thus “confession” is to “say the same thing.” The Christian’s Confession is simply believing with our heart and repeating with our lips **God’s own declaration** of what we are and have in Christ, **what He says about us**, our sins and everything included in our redemption. *You think like a man – you don’t think like God!*^{Mk.8:33} *Your thoughts concerning God are too human.*^{Martin Luther} It is a **Good Confession**. A spiritual law that few recognize is that our confession rules us. It is what we confess with our lips that really dominates our inner being. **We must make our lips do their duty and make them harmonize with the Word of God**. As we fill them with God’s Word we must make them say what God says about us and not allow them to say anything to the contrary. We must refuse to allow them to destroy the effectiveness of God’s Word in our situation. Some confess with their lips but deny in their heart. They say, “*Yes, the Word is true,*” but in their heart they say, “*But it is not true in my case.*” The confession of our lips has no value as long as our heart repudiates it. **CONFESSION** (saying what God says in each of His promises) is made **UNTO SALVATION**.^{Rom.10:10}

It is our privilege and duty to believe and say what we know God says about us in His Word.

As we honour God by applying these principles we will live above our circumstances instead of under them!

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.^{1Cor.15:57}

Sunday 13th October 2013 Ps.119: 57-64

John Kuti is preaching this Sunday, so I am using this extract from Greg Koukl’s book “Tactics”.

Responses to three common challenges to Christianity

Asking a clarification question, even a simple one, can break the tension of an awkward moment and buy you some time. It may even yield information you hadn’t expected.

Challenge: *“I don’t believe in God anymore. It’s simply not rational, there is no proof.”*

Response: *“Specifically, what is irrational about believing in God?”*

Here it is unclear what kind of God is being rejected. For some people, God is an old man with a beard sitting on a throne out in space somewhere. If that’s the kind of God they *don’t* believe in, then I agree with them. Some reject the notion of a personal God, but still believe in an impersonal god-force that animates the universe. Or it may turn out I’m simply dealing with good old-fashioned naturalistic, materialistic atheism. In any case, I need more information before I can continue. When you first encounter an atheist, you could launch into something like the *kalam cosmological argument* for God’s existence (*something caused the Universe to begin to exist, and this first cause must be God*) — if you knew it, if you understood it, and if you remembered it!!!!

But why make things hard on yourself? A question serves you much better initially.

The demand for proof of God's existence is sometimes a trick. It may be a reasonable request for evidence, but often it is not. Unless you know in advance what kind of evidence would count (*scientific? historical? philosophical arguments? revelation?*) or what kind of "proof" would be satisfying (*absolute proof? proof beyond a reasonable doubt? proof based on the preponderance of evidence?*), you'll probably be wasting your time. It's too easy for an intellectually dishonest person to dismiss your efforts. "Not good enough," is all he needs to say.

The charge that belief in God is irrational is common, but completely without basis. I'm not going to let anyone who makes this assertion off easily. I want to know, specifically, how theism is at odds with good thinking. Believing in leprechauns is irrational. Believing in God, by contrast, is like believing in atoms. The process is exactly the same. You follow the evidence of what you *can* see to conclude the existence of something you *cannot* see. The effect needs a cause adequate to explain it.

There is nothing irrational or unreasonable about the idea of a personal God creating the material universe. A **Big Bang** needs a "**big Banger**," it seems to me. A complex set of instructions (as in DNA) needs an author. A blueprint requires an engineer. A moral law needs a moral lawgiver. **This is not a leap; it is a step of intelligent reflection.**

Challenge: *"Who are we to say Christianity is better than any other religion? I think the essence of Jesus' teaching is love, the same as all religions. It's not our job to tell other people how to live or believe."*

Response: *"Isn't telling people to love one another just another example of telling them how they should live and believe?"*

This presents another common challenge: religious pluralism. First, the comments show a naïve understanding of other religions (they actually vary wildly in fundamental beliefs). Second, pluralism presumes that the similarities between faiths are more important than the differences. Are aspirin and arsenic basically the same because they both come in tablet form? For some things, the differences are critical. Religion is one of them.

It's also clear that Jesus was not a pluralist. As an observant Jew, he held to the Ten Commandments. Foremost among them was the first: The Lord is God and we owe fidelity to him alone. All other religions are distortions and deceptions. The early followers of Christ were first called "*Christians*" in Antioch by others (Acts 11:26). Their name for themselves was simply "*the Way*" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4, 24:14, 22). Did you notice, by the way, that this person's minimal theology ("*The essence of Jesus' teaching is love, not telling other people how to live or believe*") does not allow him to escape his own charge? He has his own theological convictions — love, not judgment — that he thinks should govern how other people think and believe. This, of course, is a judgment itself.

Challenge: *"I've read the Bible before, it's got some interesting stories, but people take it too seriously. It was only written by men, after all, and men make mistakes."*

Response: *"It might be best to let Jesus speak for himself."*

Here the key word is "*only*," as in "*the Bible was only written by men.*" Notice that the statement itself presumes what it's attempting to prove, that the Bible is a purely human document. Since this is the very question at issue, the attempt is circular. But there's a more fundamental problem. Even without God's help, fallible human beings sometimes get it right. Our libraries are filled with books written by mere mortals who seem completely capable of accuracy, insight, and wisdom. If this is true of so many others, why not of Paul, Peter, John, or Jesus?

I understand that this is not a slam-dunk argument for inspiration. It is not meant to be. Remember, my goal is modest. **I want to put a stone in the person's shoe.** I want to get him thinking. I want him to consider listening to Jesus first before dismissing him. If I can simply open that door, I have accomplished something important. Here's why.

Most people who believe in the authority of the Bible did not come to this conviction through argument, but through encounter. For example, when soldiers were sent to arrest Jesus early in his ministry, they returned empty-handed. Why had they disobeyed orders? Because they had listened. "*Never did a man speak the way this man speaks,*" they said (John 7:46). Jesus didn't start his discourse with reasons why people should believe his words. Instead, he simply spoke the truth, and it immediately resonated with many in the crowd.

I came to believe the Bible was God's Word in the same way I suspect you did. I encountered the truth first-hand and was moved by it. If you want sceptics to believe in the Bible, don't get into a tug-of-war with them about inspiration. Instead, invite them to listen — to engage Jesus' words first-hand — then let the Spirit do the heavy lifting for you. So when someone says the Bible was "*only written by men,*" I ask questions to encourage him or her to treat Jesus like any other teacher. I want that person to listen to the words of Jesus first, then draw conclusions. In my travel bag, I keep copies of John's Gospel, and I offer one as a gift, suggesting, "*It might be best to let Jesus speak for himself.*" Once my new friend has read a bit, any further reasons I give for biblical authority will have the soil needed to take root.

Taken from *Tactics - A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* by Greg Koukl

Sunday 20th October 2013 Ps.119: 65-72 John 6

Spiritual life comes from a Person not philosophy. *The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! The words I have spoken to you are from the Spirit. They give life.*^{Jn.6:63}

In Chinese philosophy, the concept of yin-yang is used to describe how seemingly opposite or contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world such as light and dark, high and low, hot and cold, fire and water, life and death etc. Yin and yang is thought of as complementary (instead of opposing) forces interacting to form a dynamic system in which the whole is greater than the parts. Whilst the yin-yang philosophy may have some value for natural events, it has no spiritual significance at all – in fact it is the opposite of the truth! The main religious influences in China that promote yin-yang are Taoism (where good-bad distinctions are not real) and Confucianism (which does have a moral dimension) but in common with all religions (other than Christianity), they do not have a true understanding of God because He is only known through Jesus Christ. We should never let non-Christian influences (including yin-yang) shape the way we think about spiritual matters. Likewise, Tolkien's influence (due to popularity of the *Lord of the Rings* books and films) has permeated many Christians' beliefs so that they think there is a fight between good and evil (even though good triumphs).

God is in control of this world - He always has been and always will be: *Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my king on Zion my holy mountain."*^{Ps.2:1-6}

There is no a dualism of 2 opposing (or complimentary) forces - good and evil or God and devil. The devil comes only to steal and kill and destroy;^{Jn.10:10} the devil [is] a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.^{Jn.8:44} There has never been a contest between God and the devil. Although the devil has attacked God, God has never needed to fight the devil – it only required a word from Jesus to dispel the devil: *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil... Jesus said to him "Away from me, Satan! For it is written:..." Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.*^{Matt.4:1-11} *When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.*^{Matt.8:16}

God is Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnibenevolent: *For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*^{Rom.11:36} *to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*^{Rom.16:27} *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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.*^{Col.1:15-17} *For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;*^{Ps.11:5} *You are good, and what you do is good.*^{Ps.119:68} So when the devil opposed God, the outcome was never in doubt and the devil was disarmed, defeated and his work destroyed by Jesus submitting to His Father's Will when He died on the cross: *Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.*^{Lk.22:42} *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.*^{1Jn.3:8} *Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.*^{Jn.12:31} *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.*^{Heb.2:14-15} *[Jesus] took away the weapons of the powers and authorities. He made a public show of them. He won the battle over them by dying on the cross.*^{Col.2:15}

Augustine described the devil as "God's monkey" because he is unable to be original or think creatively. The devil only copies what God has done but he always messes up and brings chaos instead of order, death instead of life, pain instead of pleasure, hurt instead of happiness, curse instead of blessing. The only original thing that the devil did was sin! That original sin was pride: *You were in Eden, the garden of God... you were anointed as a guardian cherub... You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour. So I threw you to the earth.*^{Ezek.28:13-17} Pride is self-importance, smugness, conceit, an enlarged ego; and it creeps in unexpectedly and undetected until one day it controls. *If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.*^{Lev.26:18-19} *But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride brought him down. He wasn't faithful to the LORD his God.*^{2Chron.2:16} *In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there*

is no room for God.^{Ps.10:4} When pride comes, then comes disgrace,^{Prov.11:2} Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.^{Prov.16:18} These are the ways of the world: wanting to please our sinful selves, wanting the sinful things we see, and being too proud of what we have. None of these come from the Father, but all of them come from the world. The world and everything that people want in it are passing away, but the person who does what God wants lives forever.^{1Jn.2:16-17} We need to ensure that we learn from the past and don't get caught out by that original sin of pride. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.^{Rom.12:16} God opposes the proud but shows grace to the humble.^{Jas.4:6}

When Jesus said that His words were full of Spirit and life,^{Jn.6:63} He was explaining that **there is hope and a future for us now. We are not destined to be dominated by circumstances, sin or the devil** because if we hear what Jesus says and "believe" Him (i.e. act on His words because we know them to be true) we will be free from sin. Jesus replied, "What I'm about to tell you is true. Everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave has no lasting place in the family. But a son belongs to the family forever. So if the Son of Man sets you free, you will really be free."^{Jn.8:34-36} If the devil attacks us, we don't have to submit and if we do succumb to the devil's schemes,^{Eph.6:11} there is a way of escape for us: 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.^{1Cor.10:13} Anyone who serves the Lord must ...gently teach those who oppose him. Maybe God will give a change of heart to those who are against you. That will lead them to know the truth. Maybe they will come to their senses. Maybe they will escape the devil's trap. He has taken them prisoner to do what he wanted.^{2Tim.2:24-26} We don't have to be trapped by our sins! We can resist the devil by submitting to God and saying no! Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.^{Jas.4:7} For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.^{Tit.2:11-12} And take the sword of the Holy Spirit. The sword is God's word.^{Eph.6:17}

The best way of dispelling darkness is to switch the light on! Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.^{Is.60:1-2} For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.^{Eph.5:8-12} The devil has no authority over us and cannot harm us: You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.^{1John 4:4} We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him [God's Son holds them securely and the evil one cannot get his hands on them^{NLT}]. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true--even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.^{1John 5:18-20}

A living Christ and a living Father God perfectly satisfies. When faith dies philosophy flourishes. Debating evil has little to do with faith except knock it flat. We are ministers not philosophers. Our calling is compassion, prayer faith and the Word of God.

So let's live our life confident in God and dependent on Jesus the Word of God.

Sunday 27th October Ps.119: 73-80 John 7

Can you see the wood and the trees?

Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.^{Jn.7:24}

If someone can't see the wood for the trees, they get so caught up in small details that they fail to understand the bigger picture. We need to be able to see life from God's perspective if we are going to live as God intends us to live. The spiritual (eternal) dimension is actually more important than the physical (temporal). We committed ourselves to obey (*believe and behave*) God when we became Christians and there are many benefits to seeing the "bigger picture": a sense of fairness and rightness; a stable life; a balanced and stress-free life; a confidence that we are doing the right thing; an assurance that we are honouring God. *I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him.*^{Ecd.8:12}

Being spiritually mature is not about having emotional experiences (however dramatic they may be) or even using the "gifts of the Spirit" such as prophecy, visions or tongues.

Spiritual maturity is knowing, understanding and applying the principles of God's Kingdom (i.e. the New Covenant as revealed in Scripture) in every situation.

And a person who is living on milk isn't very far along in the Christian life and doesn't know much about doing what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right.^{Heb.5:13-14}

We should never act as if we were mere humans: 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? ...Brothers and sisters, ...are you not **acting** like mere humans? ...Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?^{1Cor.3:1-16}

We are no longer mere humans – we are Holy Spirit-filled Believers who are the Church: God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a people who belong to God. ...But now you are the people of God ...now you have received mercy.^{1Pet.2:9-10}

We are the church of God, which he bought with the blood of his own Son.^{Acts 20:28} **Believers are far more than sinners saved by grace – we are sons of God with the full rights of heirs:** Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves great wealth for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. And that's the way it was with us before Christ came... But when the right time came, God sent his Son... to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children... Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you.... Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things... - free from the law.^{Gal.4:1-12}

God wants us to live as Believers throughout our whole life and then die as Believers too! All these people were still living by faith when they died... Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.^{Heb.11:13-16}

But 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.^{Ps.82:6-7}

The Bible should never be used to back up our own opinions by quoting a verse out of context. For instance Jesus said: *Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*^{Matt.7:1} But the next verse explains that Jesus meant we should be careful how we treat others because we

reap what we sow - we will have the same conditions applied to us: *For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*^{Matt.7:2} We are to be discerning and make judgments but cautiously and without condemning. *The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments.*^{1Cor.2:15} As Christians we cannot “sit on the fence” and we should have opinions about issues such as politics, poverty, pollution, the environment etc. but our opinion only really counts if we agree with God: *How terrible it will be for anyone who argues with his Maker!*^{Is.45:9} God has sound judgement: *Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power.*^{Prov.8:14} *The Branch will take delight in respecting the LORD. He will not judge things only by the way they look. He won't make decisions based simply on what people say. He will always do what is right when he judges those who are in need. He'll be completely fair when he makes decisions about poor people.*^{Is.11:3-4} But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”^{1Sam.16:7} Because we have the mind of Christ, we are qualified to make sound judgements on matters regardless of our academic, financial or social standing: *Don't you know that God's people will judge the world? And if you are going to judge the world, aren't you able to judge small cases? Don't you know that we will judge angels? Then we should be able to judge the things of this life even more! So if you want to press charges in matters like that, appoint as judges members of the church who aren't very important!*^{1Cor.6:2-4} If we take time get to know God (by reading the Scriptures and communing with Him in prayer), we can be His spokespeople: *But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people,*^{Jer.23:22} *if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman.*^{Jer.15:19} Our judgement or discernment should be sound, not superficial: *Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly. (Rise above the letter of the law to the spirit of the law; use your head—and heart!—to discern what is right, to test what is authentically right.)*^{Jn.7:24} God has given us godly wisdom so we can apply the information recorded in the Bible to our daily lives (Maturity) and also encourage others to do the same. *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.*^{1Cor.1:30} *If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.*^{Jas.1:5-8} This “godly wisdom” is from the in-dwelling Holy Spirit who is also called the “Spirit of Jesus” (i.e. He is exactly like Jesus and helps us in the same way). Yes, *and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*^{Phil.1:18-19} *If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him.*^{Jn.14:15-17}

Let us each strive to be spiritually mature seeing life from God's perspective and living as God intended us to. *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.*^{2Tim.2:15}

This is my Bible; I am what it says I am, I have what it says I have, I can do what it says I can do. Today, I will be taught the Word of God. I boldly confess that my mind is alert, my heart is receptive and I am about to receive the Incorruptible, Indestructible, Ever-living seed of the Word of God. I will never be the same. In Jesus Name. Amen

November

God the Lord: Hallelujah! *For our Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory unto Him!* ^{Rev. 19:6-7}

Sunday 3rd November 2013 Isaiah 61 Ruth.

Don't forget the sugar!

Our life can be compared to baking a cake. Recipes need the main ingredients (such as flour) plus liquid (such as water or oil) and some flavouring (such as sugar, salt and spices). Without each of these ingredients the finished product would be very bland or even inedible. The "recipe" we each follow through life may be similar (we are born, we mature and then we die) but the quantity of the ingredients (i.e. the amount of suffering, illness, pleasure, achievement etc.) differ, thus making each life unique. Too much hardship and life could become bitter; not enough hardship and life could become flippant and we would then forget that every action and word has consequences. *And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.* ^{Matt. 12:36-37}

Naomi felt that life had become too hard for her: *Don't call me Naomi (pleasant), call me Mara (bitter). The Mighty One has made my life very bitter. I was full when I went away. But the LORD has brought me back empty. So why are you calling me Naomi? The LORD has made me suffer. The Mighty One has brought trouble on me.* ^{Ruth 1:20-21} But eventually her life was turned around and she became a Grandmother: *We praise the LORD. Today he has provided a family protector for you. May this child become famous all over Israel! He will make your life new again. He'll take care of you when you are old. He's the son of your very own daughter-in-law. She loves you. She is better to you than seven sons.* ^{Ruth 4:14}

Many years before Naomi, when the Israelites encountered bitter water, the cure was a piece of wood. (Actually their hearts were more bitter than the water!) *When they came to Marah, they couldn't drink its water. It was bitter... The people told Moses they weren't happy with him. They said, "What are we supposed to drink?" Then Moses cried out to the LORD. The LORD showed him a stick. Moses threw it into the water. The water became sweet... "I am the LORD who heals you".* ^{Ex. 15:20-27}

That piece of wood was a picture of the Cross on which, many years later, Jesus would die to heal our hearts of sin's bitterness: *and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.* ^{Col. 1:20} *He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.* ^{1Pet. 2:24}

There is another tree in the Scriptures that brings healing and it is called the Tree of Life. This is a picture of Jesus Himself – the source of all life. *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life. It was as clear as crystal. It flowed from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit. Its fruit was ripe every month. The leaves of the tree bring healing to the nations. There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. God's servants will serve him. They will see his face. His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun. The Lord God will give them light. They will rule for ever and ever.* ^{Rev. 22:1-5} *"Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not dry up. The trees will always have fruit on them. Every month they will bear fruit. The water from the temple will flow to them. Their fruit will be used for food. And their leaves will be*

used for healing.” ^{Ez.47:12} The River represents the Holy Spirit Who was given when Jesus ascended to the Father: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* ^{Acts 1:8} *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley... It will be a unique day—a day known only to the LORD—with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter. The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.* ^{Zech.14:4-9} *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.* ^{Jn.7:39} *But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.* ^{Jn.14:26}

Wisdom is also referred to as a Tree of Life because Jesus is the real source of all wisdom: *She is a tree of life to those who hold her close. Those who hold on to her will be blessed.* ^{Pron.3:18} *God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.* ^{1Cor.1:30}

After Adam sinned he was not allowed to eat of the Tree of Life or he would then have had to live forever in his sinful state. *The LORD God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and his wife to wear. The LORD God said, “The man has become like one of us. He can now tell the difference between good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and pick fruit from the tree of life and eat it. If he does, he will live forever.”* ^{Gen.3:21-22}

That was a reminder of what Jesus would accomplish when He died on the cross because we are now able to eat from the Tree of Life and receive its benefits (which is eternal life):

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. ^{Rev.2:7} *“Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will have the right to come to the tree of life. They will be allowed to go through the gates into the city.”* ^{Rev.22:14}

We do not know how life will treat us and we may make many mistakes: The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. ^{Ecd.2:14} *A man doesn't know when trouble will come to him. Fish are caught in nets. Birds are taken in traps. And people are trapped by hard times that come when they don't expect them.* ^{Ecd.9:12}

But as Believers we have absolute confidence that God will work every situation for His glory and our ultimate good: *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.* ^{Rom.8:28}

As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. ^{Gen.50:20} *Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.* ^{Is.38:17}

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy; All play and no work makes Jack a mere toy.

We really do need some hardship in our life - but not too much! We need sugar as well as salt in our recipe! To make a happy and contented life we need a balance of hardship and happiness; trauma and tranquillity; reality and riches: *First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name.* ^{Pron.30:8-9} *If they are bound in chains and caught up in a web of trouble, he shows them the reason. He shows them their sins of pride. He gets their attention and commands that they turn from evil. “If they listen and obey God, they will be blessed with prosperity throughout their lives. All their*

years will be lived in contentment.^{Job.36:8-11} Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.^{Lk.12:14} But godliness with contentment is great gain.^{1Tim.6:6}

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.^{Rom.5:3-5}

Don't think of yourself as "bitter" because life is hard or "unfair" as Naomi did. Talk (and sing) about how God has given us *a spirit of praise in place of a spirit of sadness...* [We] will be called priests of the LORD. [We] will be named workers for our God... And [we] will be filled with joy that will last forever.^{Is.61:3-7} The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.^{Prov.10:22} **So don't forget the sugar!**

Remembrance Sunday 10th November 2013. Ps.119: 81-88

The War to end all Wars

During August 1914, immediately after the outbreak of World War I, H. G. Wells published a number of articles in the London newspapers that subsequently appeared as a book entitled "*The War That Will End War*" arguing that only the defeat of German militarism could bring about an end to war. Cynicism soon crept in though and David Lloyd George is reputed to have said, "*This war, like the next war, is a war to end war.*" WWI Hostilities formally ended *at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month* in accordance with the Armistice signed by representatives of Germany and the Allies in 1918. (*The Allies included the British Empire, the French Republic, the Russian Empire, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, Romania, the Czechoslovak legions and the USA.*) An armistice is not the same as a peace treaty, which may take months or even years to agree on. "*Armistice*" comes from the Latin *arma*, (weapons) and *statium*, (stopping) and is not necessarily the end of a war. (N.B. the *1953 Korean War Armistice Agreement* was not followed by a peace treaty and so North and South Korea are still technically at war!) Although the armistice ended the actual fighting, it took six months of negotiations at the *Paris Peace Conference* to conclude the Peace Treaty - the *Treaty of Versailles* - on 28th June 1919.

We remember with gratitude those who have died in armed conflicts to give us the freedom we so love and cherish – the liberty of democracy and the recourse to law when wronged. But the greatest freedom we have is spiritual freedom which comes from peace with God. This also came with the price of blood – Jesus blood ...*the church of God, which he bought with the blood of his own Son.*^{Acts 20:28}

Jesus' death was the climax of this world's greatest war – the war that really will end all wars - when satan, this world's greatest enemy, was defeated and disarmed. *Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle, and he and his angels were forced out of heaven. This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, 'It has come at last—salvation and power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth—the one who accuses them before our God day and night. And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.'*^{Rev.12:7-12}

However God never signed an *Armistice* with the devil nor will He ever sign a *Peace Treaty* either! **The devil was utterly defeated by Jesus' obedient submission to God's will when He died on the cross:** *Christ Jesus... being in very nature God... and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*^{Phil.2:5-11} *Together they will go to war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them because he is Lord of all lords and King of all kings.*^{Rev.17:14}

Although the book of Revelation describes *Michael and his angels [fighting] against the dragon and his angels*, this is more metaphorical than literal as God has all power and all authority. He only ever needs to speak and His Will is achieved: *You have made your Name and your Word greater than anything. On the day I called to you, you answered me. You made me strong and brave.*^{Psa.138:2-3} *It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.*^{Is.55:11} *But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*^{Matt.8:8}

The Word of God is described as a sword because we can use it to destroy the lies of the enemy: *And take the sword of the Holy Spirit. The sword is God's word.*^{Eph.6:17} *The word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any sword that has two edges. It cuts deep enough to separate soul from spirit.*^{Heb.4:12} *In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword.*^{Rev.1:16} *We fight with weapons that are different from those the world uses. Our weapons have power from God that can destroy the enemy's strong places. We destroy people's arguments and every proud thing that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ.*^{2Cor.10:4-5}

When Jesus paid the ultimate price for us He likened His death to sowing a seed: *The hour has come for the Son of Man to receive glory. What I'm about to tell you is true. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only one seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves his life will lose it. But anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it and have eternal life. Anyone who serves me must follow me. And where I am, my servant will also be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. My heart is troubled. What should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No. This is the very reason I came to this hour. Father, bring glory to your name.*^{Jn.12:23-28}

Because we have been bought with this price we now belong to God: *You are not your own; you were bought at a price.*^{1Cor.6:19-20}

The WW1 casualties from both Allies and Germans totalled 36 million including 16 million deaths. Very few places had no losses and these were called “*Thankful Villages*”. Initially there were 32 “*Thankful Villages*” in England and Wales (in an October 2013 update, researchers identified 53); 13 of these are considered “*doubly thankful*” because they lost no service personnel in WWII either. (There are none in Scotland or Northern Ireland and only 1 in France!) And if that was not bad enough, the “*Spanish Flu*” pandemic from January 1918 – December 1920 killed up to 50 million people world-wide. **However neither war nor disease increases death because death is total in every generation** and our natural bodies cannot last forever: *Brothers and sisters, here is what I'm telling you. Bodies made of flesh and blood can't share in the kingdom of God. And what dies can't share in what never dies. 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.^{1Cor.15:50-57}

Death for Believers is not the "icy hands of the Grim Reaper" but the loving arms of our Heavenly Father calling us home: *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*^{Dent.33:27} Jesus told a story of angels escorting Lazarus into eternity: *"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side."*^{Lk.16:22} **In fact for the Believer, death is likened to falling asleep** *"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.*^{Jn.11:11-13} As Jesus died He committed His spirit to His Father: *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* When he had said this, he breathed his last.^{Lk.23:46} When Paul was in prison, he debated the pros and cons of living and dying: *I know that you are praying for me. I also know that the Spirit of Jesus Christ will help me. So no matter what happens, I'm sure I will still be saved. I completely expect and hope that I won't be ashamed in any way. I'm sure I will be brave enough. Now as always Christ will be lifted high through my body. He will be lifted up whether I live or die. For me, life finds all of its meaning in Christ. Death also has its benefits. Suppose I go on living in my body. Then I will be able to carry on my work. It will bear a lot of fruit. But what should I choose? I don't know. I can't decide between the two. I long to leave this world and be with Christ. That is better by far.*^{Phil.1:19-23}

Today as we remember the Service men and women who died, let us also remember our Saviour Who fought the "war to end all wars". He died to give us true freedom so let us continue to live in that freedom: *Christ has set us free. He wants us to enjoy freedom. So stand firm. Don't let the chains of slavery hold you again.*^{Gal.5:1}

Sunday 17th November 2013 Ps.119: 89-96 John 8

Who is your father?^{1Sam.10:12}

Family likeness is caught as well as inherited and we often do things just because our parents did them. We imitate their mannerisms and their "world-view" becomes ours! As Christians we know that God is our Father and so we should bear some resemblance to Him - but what is God really like? God is often portrayed as austere, intolerant, judgmental and vindictive but that is not how the Bible portrays Him. He is holy, pure and righteous but also merciful and loving – at least 13 times in the OT God is referred to as "gracious and compassionate".

However if we really want to know what God is like, we must look at Jesus: *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. So how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father? Don't you believe that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. The Father lives in me. He is the One who is doing his work.*^{Jn.14:9-10} Then Jesus cried out, *"Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."*^{Jn.12:44-46} *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the*

right hand of the Majesty in heaven.^{Heb.1:3} Jesus' representation to us of God the Father was not just theoretical but tangible: *When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion. Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honoured him far beyond anyone or anything, ever.*^{Phil.2:6-9}

If we are God's children we will share some of the same characteristics as Jesus our Elder Brother, such as His holiness, compassion and graciousness: *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. For he said to God, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people."*^{Heb.2:11-12} God gave testimony to His First-Born Son: *this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*^{Matt.17:5} God should be able to say the same about His other children – that He loves us, that He is pleased with us and that we have something important to say.

Growing as a Christian means that we train ourselves to confess (*confess means to say the same*) **Jesus as Lord – that we agree with God about every area of our life.** It means **that we really do believe that Jesus forgave our sins** (*because Jesus was punished in our place*^{Is.53:4-6}); **that we really do believe that we are righteous** (*because Jesus' righteousness has been attributed to us*^{Rom.1:17;3:22;4:4}); **that we really do believe that God is our Father** (*because we have been born again*^{Jn.3:3;1Pet.1:23}); **that we really do believe that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have made their home in us** (*because Jesus said so: And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.*^{Jn.14:16-17} *All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.*^{Jn.14:23-26}). **When we believe these truths, we will talk about them and sing about them, making them part of our conscious and subconscious nature – they will become our “norm”.**

When God became our Father, He breathed His life into us by the Holy Spirit, **so it is natural for us to reflect God's character and personality.** But we still have the memory of life without God and it is easy for us to slip back into the old way of thinking, speaking and living – to *act like mere humans.*^{1Cor.3:3} **We still have to train ourselves to distinguish good from evil.**^{Heb.5:14} **Our worship songs should articulate what we believe about God, Jesus, man, the Cross and the Resurrection.** This will reinforce what we know and also help us grow in our faith: *We will not mature in our faith if we are praying or singing things together as a congregation that are shallow or disconnected. Worship should be less about making us feel good and more about fundamentally changing who we are as the people of God. It's really hard to find songs that are focused simply on who God is. There are a lot of songs about my response to God in worship, but songs that focus on him should be our bread and butter. 2Corinthians 3 says if we gaze on God's glory we change; not if we focus on ourselves. So much worship music is focused not on God but on my experience of God. If a whole service is comprised of those types of songs, I just don't see how that's transformational.*^{Weightier Worship - <http://magazine.biola.edu>}

Although God is our *Heavenly Father*^{Matt.6:9} there are also people who are “*spiritual fathers*” to us - those who have imparted sound, wholesome, godly values to us. They are different from the odd acquaintance who has blessed us with a “*word in season*”. “*Spiritual fathers*” are people who look out for our welfare, with no hidden agenda and do not try to manipulate or control us. When our own children reach the age of accountability – and especially when they leave home – they are responsible for their own actions but as parents we are always there to help them when needed. So it is with our “*spiritual fathers*”. We know that we can always turn to them because they have proven themselves worthy in their attitude and actions to us in the past. They have left us a good example to follow and are reliable, trustworthy and faithful (full-of-faith). *I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*^{1Cor.4:14-17}

Abraham is also called our “*spiritual father*” because we have the same faith as him: *Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth.*^{Is.51:1-2} *God accepted Abraham's faith, and so his faith made him right with God... his faith had made him right with God... So Abraham is the father of all believers... God accepts their faith. So their faith makes them right with him.*^{Rom.4:9-11} *So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe.*^{Rom.4:16} Abraham's example of faith is described like this: *When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn't do but on what God said he would do.*^{Rom.4:18}

God has no Grandchildren! This “*root-stock*” of faith that we can trace back to Abraham is not naturally inherited but spiritually inherited: “*Our father is Abraham!*” they declared. “No,” Jesus replied, “for if you were really the children of Abraham, you would follow his example. Instead, you are trying to kill me because I told you the truth, which I heard from God. Abraham never did such a thing. No, you are imitating your real father.” ...*For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.*^{Jn.8:39-44} *For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.*^{Rom.2:28-29} So when Saul began to prophesy with the Prophets, one astute person asked: *And who is their father?*^{1Sam.10:12} **Do you only have a human father or can you claim God as your Heavenly Father too? As the birthday-song lyrics ask:** *Born again means salvation, How may [birthdays] have you?*

Sunday 24th November 2013 Ps.119: 97-104 John 9

Does God hurt to help?^{Jn.9:3}

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”^{Jn.9:1-3} You could read this

passage as if God made the man blind so Jesus could heal him. That is morally repugnant and incompatible with the knowledge we have of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Anyway, there were enough blind people in Israel without God making one more just so He could heal him! Now this verse hinges on the Greek word, “*hina*” which is usually translated “*so that*” or “*in order that*”. “*This has happened so that the work of God might be displayed in him*”. This implies that God destined the man to be blind just so Jesus could heal him but the words “*this has happened*” are not in the Greek text at all. The meaning of “*hina*” is not fixed and also means “*let it be*”. So what Jesus actually said was “*Neither has this man sinned nor his parents, but LET the works of God be done*” - then He healed the man.

It would be wrong to think that God is the source of everything that happens or that God causes misfortunes so He can step in and rectify it for His glory. The disciples were uselessly speculating about the man’s blindness and its cause. Jesus never did and He wasn’t interested in the disciples’ question - only in healing the man. It is as if He said “*Never mind who or what is to blame, let the works of God be manifested*”. This could be paraphrased as: *You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.*^{Jn.9:3-5}

If we know what God is like - His character and His nature – we could never attribute harm, wrong or ill to Him.

God is Omnipotent: He has the ability and power to do anything within His character (there are some things that God cannot do such as lie, deny His own Word or sin). *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations.”*^{Lk.2:28-31} The word translated “Sovereign” is actually “despot” but just because God is Omnipotent (*all-powerful*) doesn’t make Him bad or a tyrant. He is Lord and “in charge” of everything because He is the Creator of everything. *We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment.*^{Col.1:15-17}

God is Omnibenevolent: He is perfectly good and all love. *LORD, be good to me as you have promised. Increase my knowledge and give me good sense, because I believe in your commands. Before I went through suffering, I went down the wrong path. But now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good. Teach me your orders.*^{Ps.119:65-68} *Jesus answered: Why do you call me good? No one is good except God.*^{Mk.10:18} *The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can’t know him if you don’t love.*^{1Jn.4:8}

We should never blame God for bad things – for wrong or harm – because that is not His character. *Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, who does not change like their shifting shadows.*^{Jas.1:16-17} *Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*^{Gen.18:25} *In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*^{Job.1:22}

God is just (but not fair): God requires justice but doesn’t give us what we deserve – He is a God of Grace. By punishing Jesus in our place, God administers justice whilst forgiving us! *But it was our sins that did that ...ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He*

took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed.^{Is.53:5} We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.^{Acts 15:11} I am the LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin.^{Ex.34:6-7}

But if we reject God's offer of Jesus' grace and forgiveness, there is no other way to be forgiven: But I do not excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected - even children in the third and fourth generations.^{Ex.34:7} **This does not mean that God punishes us for our parents' sins but that our parent's sins influence the way we are brought up, the way we think and the way we live.**

'The parents eat sour grapes. But the children have a bitter taste in their mouths.' "You will not use that proverb in Israel anymore," announces the LORD and King. "And that is just as sure as I am alive. Everyone belongs to me. Father and son alike belong to me. People will die because of their own sins."^{Ez.18:2-4} If we give up and turn our backs on all we've learned, all we've been given, all the truth we now know, we repudiate Christ's sacrifice and are left on our own to face the Judgment—and a mighty fierce judgment it will be! If the penalty for breaking the law of Moses is physical death, what do you think will happen if you turn on God's Son, spit on the sacrifice that made you whole, and insult this most gracious Spirit?^{Heb.10:26}

Those who reject Jesus as God's remedy for sin, call God a liar: Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son. All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life.^{1Jn.5:10-12}

Whilst He does not hurt to help, God certainly does help and heal because that is His character and nature.

Help: God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help (always ready to help) in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.^{Ps.46:1-2} Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.^{Heb.2:18} But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike.^{Acts26:22}

Heal: for I am the LORD, who heals you.^{Ex.15:26} He sent forth his word and healed them;^{Ps.107:20} He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.^{1Pet.2:24}

Library shelves are full of volumes philosophising on the subject of suffering. Debating evil has little to do with faith, except knock it flat. We are ministers, not philosophers - our calling is compassion, prayer, faith and the Word of God.

Our terms, "Full Gospel" or "Foursquare" means we proclaim **Jesus** as **Saviour, Baptiser, Healer and Coming King.**

Like Jesus, let us declare loud and clear "Let the works of God be manifest!" But then it is up to us to represent God here and now, among the people we live, by being His Ambassadors – starting with our own community but reaching out to the ends of the earth: So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.^{2Cor.5:20-21}

December

God the Redeemer: *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us.* ^{Eph.1:7}

Sunday 1st December 2013 Ps.119:105-112

How strong is your shield? How firm is your faith?

Leather equipment - especially "tack" like saddles and bridles - needs "feeding" with oil to keep it supple or it will dry out and become brittle. A good horseman will always clean his tack after riding because of **Presentation** - *it looks better*, **Preservation** - *it keeps longer and stays supple*; and **Protection** - *any weaknesses or damage can be identified*.

In olden days shields were made of leather and if they were not oiled regularly they would crack and become useless. *Get up, you princes, oil the shields!* ^{Ps.21:5}

God is our Shield: *But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.* ^{Ps.3:3} *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.* ^{Ps.28:7}

Faith is our response to God – how we view God. A better word for "faith" is "trust" – **we trust God and what He says**. God is always right because He is God, but we also know He is right because of **what He is like** (His character), **what He has said** (His Word – the Scriptures) and **what He has done** (His reputation as revealed in the Scriptures). *Those who do not believe God's witness are calling him a liar. That's because they have not believed his witness about his Son.* ^{1Jn.5:10} *How terrible it will be for anyone who argues with his Maker!* ^{Is.45:9}

So if we believe God, we will do what He says - which is obedience. **Actually obedience is worship:** *Abraham said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there and worship. Then we'll come back to you."* The angel of the LORD called out to Abraham... *"I will bless you because of what you have done," announces the LORD. "You have not held back your son, your only son. So I will certainly bless you... All nations on earth will be blessed because of your children. All of that will happen because you have obeyed me."* ^{Gen.22:5;16-18}

In the OT, God told Israel that if they did not obey Him, He would have to treat them like a bull or a horse and **force** them to obey Him: *Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth and I will make you return by the way you came.* ^{Is.37:29}

In the NT, God resides within us and gives us the **desire** to obey Him – to respond to Him out of love and appreciation: *A new day is coming, says the Lord. I will make a new covenant... 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... I will forgive their evil ways. I will not remember their sins anymore.* ^{Heb.8:8-12}

The Bible says we should not be like the horse that needs a bit and bridle to make it obey us **but we should be willing to do what God wants**. *I will make you wise and show you where to go. I will guide you and watch over you. So don't be like a horse or donkey, that doesn't understand. They must be led with bits and reins, or they will not come near you.* ^{Ps.32: 8-9} When God breathes His life into us, we **want** to express our love for God (praise) and we want to put His Word into practice (obey Him) – there is a willingness about us. *If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land.* ^{Is.1:19}

Faith is described as a shield because it is God's protection for us. Our Shield of Faith needs regular "oiling" or it will "dry out" and become ineffective. *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 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.^{Eph.6:16-18}

We are given the shield of faith to use so we don't get harmed by the devil's attacks. Although the devil is a defeated foe, he still has the ability to deceive by lies, arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God. **But we are well prepared for his attacks if we keep our faith oiled and clean:** *The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.*^{2Cor.10:4-6}

Prayer – the active communication between us and God – **is not only essential for our spiritual life but is also the way we keep our faith effective as a shield.** *But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*^{Jude 1:20-21}

When King Saul died David lamented that his shield had been defiled because it had become dry: *For there the shield of the mighty was despised (defiled or dishonoured), the shield of Saul—no longer rubbed with oil.*^{2Sam.1:21}

Let's keep our faith in good working order because of:

Presentation - *it looks better.* An ordered mind is an ordered life. When we know what to do when under attack with temptations and thoughts that oppose God it is easier to do it immediately rather than have to ask someone for help or read 10 chapters of the Bible.

Preservation- *it keeps longer and stays supple.* God has not intended our Christian walk to be arduous or difficult, but natural and normal. Indeed if we are weary, Jesus has promised us rest: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*^{Matt.11:28} Contrast that with the OT: *Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are weary and find no rest.*^{Lam.5:5} God wants us to finish the fight of faith and complete the race: *All these people were still living by faith when they died.*^{Heb.11:13}

Protection - *any weaknesses or damage can be identified.* Whilst there is *no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus,*^{Rom.8:1} there is no excuse for Christians being lazy and we should all strive to be **Bible literate** (i.e. have a good understanding and working knowledge of the Bible from the New Covenant perspective). We should be able to explain to others the basics of the **3R's of Biblical literacy: Repentance, Remission of sins and Righteousness** because we pay attention to God's Word^{Prov.4:20-23} and *have trained [our]selves with a lot of practice and can tell the difference between good and evil.*^{Heb.5:14} Then we will be like the men of Issachar, *who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.*^{1Chron.12:32} To know the right thing and then do it - even if it is difficult - is the hallmark of a wise person: *the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, even when a person is in trouble.*^{Ecc.8:5-6}

Then our “Shield of Faith” will be strong and firm, enabling us to be able to refute every temptation and every thought that opposes God.

Sunday 8th December 2013 Ps.119:113-120

(Paul at Cheriton Pentecostal Church)

Some quick thoughts from Greg Koukl (see www.str.org)

Does It Matter If We Evolved?

If Darwinism is true, then there is no purpose or meaning to life, there is no morality, there's no qualitative difference between humans and animals, there's no life after death, and there's no purpose to human history. Now, are you trying to tell me that it doesn't really matter if people believe we evolved or not?

Treating Equals Equally

The key to answering the claims of same-sex marriage advocates is understanding the basic rule of justice: **Treat equals equally**. If parties are not equal in a relevant sense, then there is no obligation of justice to treat them the same.

When someone demands the same recognition for homosexual unions as for heterosexual unions, remind him of the rule of justice. Then ask if homosexual relationships are really equal with heterosexual ones. Does he actually believe there is no essential difference between the two? If there are essential differences, then the two are not equal and there is no moral obligation to treat them as if they were.

Further, since legal marriage is really nothing more than officially granting public respect and approval to a union of two individuals, and since you as a member of the public do not in fact approve, then you have no obligation to support homosexual "*marriage*" and can even oppose it.

Are Our Lives Our Own?

Is life a gift with a transcendent purpose to be fulfilled, or do we own ourselves and have the right to do with our bodies whatever we please? This question can be answered in part with a little reflection. Why do we feel compelled to talk someone out of suicide? Why try to dissuade them? The reason is that we have an intuitive sense that life has transcendent purpose. We're so sure of this that we try to stop people from killing themselves and "*wasting*" their lives.

A life can only be wasted if it has a purpose that is never fulfilled. If there is no purpose in life, there is no tragedy when a child is struck down in infancy, or when high school students are killed in a plane crash, or when 39 people commit suicide to fulfil a cultic hope.

Notice that the notion of "*untimely death*" here has no relation to the person's own subjective goals. The goal of a suicidal person is to die, a purpose he fulfils if he takes his life. An infant who dies unexpectedly has no goals or aspirations of his own. Yet in both cases we have this nagging suspicion that something is wrong.

Our sense of tragedy lies in our conviction that these people did not fulfil some larger purpose in life, one bigger than their own temporal wants and desires. If such a purpose exists--and our intuitions suggest that it does--then it isn't the case that our lives are our own to do with as we please.

God has made it clear that we are not the masters of our own lives. Our existence is not a thing we own, but a sacred life we are entrusted with. The commandment "*You shall not commit murder*" forbids us to take an innocent human life. It applies to taking our own lives and not just lives of others.

There's a reason for this. The fifth commandment was given not because murder violates personal liberty by taking something that belongs to someone, his life. That's

covered in the seventh commandment, "*You shall not steal.*" Instead, it prohibits the unwarranted destruction of a human being because he's made in the image of God (*see Genesis 9:6*). Murder is primarily a crime against God.

Our lives are not our own, they're a gift with a purpose to be fulfilled.

Saying Grace

I always try to bow my head and give thanks over meals in restaurants, even when I'm alone. Sometimes, though, it creates awkward moments. Just a few weeks ago, something unique happened while I was at a Mexican restaurant with my wife and girls. As usual, we held hands, bowed our heads over *enchiladas* and *chili rellenos*, and prayed. Nothing fancy, just a specific, genuine expression of thanks from the heart. When I lifted my head, I noticed our server waiting patiently—and politely—for us to finish. He then came closer, took a knee next to the table, and in broken English asked a question. Could I teach him to pray? He told me he liked the idea of giving thanks with his own family over meals, but he was a little unsure of himself. Did I have any suggestions? I thanked him for his interest, offered some thoughts, and then passed on a word of encouragement. It was a short conversation, but it reinforced for me the importance of appropriate gestures of public piety.

I have three specific reasons for saying grace in restaurants, none having anything to do with grandstanding, trying to look "*religious*" or attempting to impress anyone with my spirituality. Here they are.

First, I want to express gratitude to God. It is right to be grateful to God for every good thing we receive from Him, including what we eat (*1Tim. 4:3-5*). Giving thanks for any meal—even in the humblest circumstances with no one watching—is simply good manners towards God. Sometimes people are watching, though, which brings me to the second reason I always try to say grace publicly in restaurants. **I want to express gratitude to God before other people.** This brings me to my final reason for always saying grace publicly in restaurants: **I want my simple act of devotion to have a beneficial effect on others.** Instead of thinking the worst of those around me, I assume my behaviour might encourage them. I don't expect to get many requests for a short tutorial on prayer, but I do hope my effort will get others thinking in a positive way.

Some of those who offer a compliment turn out to be believers who weren't as bold themselves. My effort encouraged them to stand a little taller and be more concerned about honouring God rather than being anxious about the judgment of others. Even with non-believers present, I'm willing to take the risk that they may not like what they see. Those who don't share my convictions display their values publicly. Why should I, as a Christian, timidly shrink into the background?

I hope in the future you won't miss opportunities like this. Non-Christians frequently zero in on the negatives of religion. Maybe your decision in this small area will give them something positive to consider.

Sunday 15th December Ps.119: 121-128

Born that man on more may die and died that man may live!

Luke wrote his account of Jesus' life and ministry in *consecutive order* so his readers could know the *exact truth about what they had been taught.*^{Lk.1:1-4 NASB} Luke was European which makes his Gospel easier for Westerners to follow. As a non-Jew it was easier for Luke to

sympathise with the non-Jews, the religious outcasts (i.e. the “unclean” like lepers etc.). Dr Luke also includes many stories of healing.

Jesus came to save every sort of person,^{Jn.3:16} not just the Jew, or the religious, or even “nice” people. *[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*^{Matt.1:21} Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.^{Ps.130:7-8}

Sadly, most Jews were blind to God’s true character and only saw “Israel” as the “Jews” rather than “God’s people”, but some, like Simeon, understood. *For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.*^{Lk.2:30-32}

God’s plan of redemption was carefully pre-planned and He arranged world events to coincide with His plans so everything came together in exactly the way He had purposed. Because the Jews had got into such a “rut” in their religion, thinking that they were more special than others,^{Lk.18:9-14} God made sure that when Jesus came into this world, He was honoured by the pure in heart (*Mary & Joseph, Elizabeth & Zechariah, Simeon and Anna*), the outcasts (*shepherds*) and also the non-Jews (*Magi or “wise-men”*).

Because Adam, the father of all of mankind, was created in God’s image^{Gen.1:26-27} all people are important and precious to God - not just a certain tribe or race. People are more important than their position and throughout the Bible (OT & NT) God reminds us that we are to look after the poor, the vulnerable and the stranger as well as our “brother” or “neighbour”. *Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don't forget to welcome strangers. By doing that, some people have welcomed angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were in prison with them. And remember those who are treated badly as if you yourselves were suffering.*^{Heb.13:1-3} *Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker;*^{Prov.17:5} *Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.*^{Prov.14:31}

This is not an implied excuse to “mock the rich” because they too are made in God’s image. *All slaves should show full respect for their masters so they will not bring shame on the name of God and his teaching. If the masters are believers, that is no excuse for being disrespectful. Those slaves should work all the harder because their efforts are helping other believers who are well loved.*^{1Tim.6:1-2} *Slaves, obey your masters with all the respect you should give them. Obey not only those who are good and kind. Obey also those who are not kind. Suppose a person suffers pain unfairly because he wants to obey God. That is worthy of praise. 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.*^{1Pet.2:18-21}

These clear instructions make no sense if this life is all there is and if there is no God to whom we have to give an account for our life. **But because this life is not the end and each of us will have to answer to God for our own life**, and especially whether we have *believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*^{1Jn.5:10-11} **Everything revolves around this one point – believing what God has told us about his Son.** Augustine said that “*the good works of an unregenerate man are in God’s sight only so many splendid sins.*” All people are capable of civil uprightness and moral good but these virtues by themselves, hold no spiritual merit with God if they are tainted with unbelief (which is the basis of all sin). *And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.*^{Heb.11:6}

When Luke wrote an exact account of Jesus' life, he left us with a credible record of Jesus' birth – its context and its purpose, as well as how God orchestrated world events to bring this event about. Luke traces Jesus' genealogy through His mother Mary, right back to Adam through King David (via his son Nathan). Matthew however traces Jesus' genealogy through Joseph (Jesus' step-father) back to Abraham through King David (but via his son Solomon). This is an important distinction as God had declared that none of the descendants of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) would ever “*sit on David's throne*” ^{Jer.22:30}. Thus Joseph was disqualified as a blood ancestor of the Messiah (David's Son who would build the true Temple – Believers – and of whom God said that He was His Father ^{Heb.1:5; 2sam.7:14}). Although births are important, our death is more important because that seals our eternal destiny – there is no turning back after we die. For the first three hundred years of the Church, birthdays were not given much emphasis – not even the birth of Jesus. No one knows for sure on what day Jesus was born and his baptism (celebrated in the feast of Epiphany – 6th January) received more attention than His birth. When a consensus arose in the Church to celebrate Christ's conception on 25th March, it was reasonable to celebrate His birth nine months later. *Born that man no more may die, Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth, Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the new-born King!”*

The Christmas story reminds us that God who is Spirit became human so we humans could become spiritual. Jesus broke the power of the devil and all his activities including death and then exchanged our sin for His righteousness and our death for His life. *Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.* ^{Heb.2:14-15} *Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.* ^{Is.53:4-6} *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* ^{2Cor.5:21}

Jesus exchanged our curses for His blessings

Punishment: *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* ^{Is.53:5}

Forgiveness: *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.* ^{Eph.1:7}

Rejection: *Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* ^{Matt.27:46}

Acceptance: *to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves (to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved* ^{NKJV}). ^{Eph.1:6}

Shame: *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ^{Heb.12:2}

Glory: *In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.* ^{Heb.2:10}

Death: *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* ^{Rom.5:8}

Life: *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* ^{Rom.6:23}

Sin: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us* ^{2Cor.5:21}

Righteousness: *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* ^{2Cor.5:21}

Poverty: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.*^{2Cor.8:9}

Riches: *...so that you through his poverty might become rich.*^{2Cor.8:9}

Sickness: *He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.*^{Matt.8:17}

Health: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*^{1Pet.2:24}

Curse: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree".*^{Gal.3:13}

Blessing: *He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*^{Gal.3:14}

Sunday 22nd December 2013 Ps.119:129-136 Matt.2

Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

At our Carol Service last week we saw what a difference something small can make: CHRISTMAS LOVE was turned into CHRIST WAS LOVE because of just one letter! This message of Christ's Love is central to the Christian Faith and it should also be central to the Christmas Festivities. It is up to us Believers to make the Christian and Christmas message plain because it is still a mystery to the non-Believers: *Pray that when I open my mouth, the right words will be given to me. Then I can be bold as I tell the mystery of the good news.*^{Eph.6:19}

As the TV and radio play Christmas carols the Christian message is not completely lost even though it may be camouflaged with commercialism. Our English word "carol" is derived from the Old French word *carole*, meaning *a circle dance accompanied by singers*. Originally it had no religious connection but was used for any singing with a parade or dance. *Wassailing* is an even older English word which comes from the Anglo-Saxon toast *Wæs þu hæl*, meaning "be thou hale" i.e. "be in good health". At this Festive time when Carols are so popular, it is an excellent opportunity for us to show the real meaning of Christmas. Just because some carols are sentimentalised with mythology doesn't mean that we have to "throw the baby out with the bath-water" and reject all of them. For instance these verses which come from "Angels from the realms of glory" are well worth singing:

Sinners, wrung with true repentance, Doomed for guilt to endless pains,

Justice now revokes the sentence, Mercy calls you; break your chains.

All creation, join in praising, God, the Father, Spirit, Son,

Evermore your voices raising To th'eternal Three in One.

Charles Wesley wrote "Hark! how all the welkin rings Glory to the King of Kings" but how many people know what "welkin" is? (Actually "welkin" means "heaven"!)

Wesley especially asked that it was sung to slow and solemn music but George Whitefield edited the words to "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and the tune was changed to a joyful cantata composed by Mendelssohn to commemorate Johann Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, making it the popular carol that we sing today.

There are many sentimental myths are connected with the nativity. For instance Luke mentions that there was *no room in the Inn*^{Lk.2:7} but this word "Inn" is misleading and so the 2010 NIV uses "guest room": *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*^{Lk.2:6-7} The 1st English translation by John Wycliffe in 1385 accurately translates it *chamber*: *And she bare her firstborn son, and wrapped him in clothes,*

and put him in a cratch [feed-trough], for there was no place to him in no chamber. This word “chamber” is the same word that Luke used for the Upper Room where Jesus held the Last Supper: *The Teacher asks, “Where is the guest room? Where can I eat the Passover meal with my disciples?” He will show you a large upstairs room with furniture in it. Prepare for us to eat there.*^{Lk.22:11-12} Luke uses another word for “Inn” in the Good Samaritan story *But a Samaritan came to the place where the man was. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him. He went to him, poured olive oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey. He took him to an inn and took care of him.*^{Lk.10:33-34} This is a very different word which means “a house for the reception of strangers.” So the real nativity story is very different from the one that is promoted in Western carols. The Biblical account of the “wise men” is also very different from the story promoted by carols. The Bible makes no mention of 3 kings visiting a stable! What the Bible actually says is that *Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”*^{Matt.2:1-2} The word “magi” (from where we get “magic”) is also found in Acts 8 where Simon is described as a “sorcerer” (*magi*). The Greek language does not differentiate between *holy* “wise-men” and *occult* “wise-men” in the way that our English language does. When these Magi found the child Jesus *they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.*^{Matt.2:10-11}

This is a wonderful explanation of worship:

- 1 **filled with joy** (not fear or panic or unbelief; there is joy in God’s presence)
- 2 **come to Jesus** (Jesus is the focus of our worship and we cannot worship God from a distance)
- 3 **bow down and worship** (this must be the attitude of our heart)
- 4 **open treasures** (our heart will be where our treasure is^{Matt.6:21}; worship requires an open heart)
- 5 **present gifts** (worship is giving to God from our treasure, i.e. our heart)

Worship is the “worth-ship” of Jesus - the value and honour we give to Him. Our word “worship” comes from the old English word “*weorscipe*” meaning “worth-ship”. *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!”*^{Rev.7:11-12}

As we remember the Nativity story again this year let’s make sure that we don’t let sentiment detract from reality or allow little things to change the true meaning of Christmas. The Biblical story has not changed and is still true today, both historically as well as spiritually:-

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.*

Wishing you a very blessed and happy Christmas

Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the

Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith - to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.^{Rom.16:25-27}

Sunday 29th December 2013 Ps.119:137-144 2Pet.1:1-21

We Have Lessons to Learn!

The best laid schemes of Mice and Men oft go awry, and leave us nothing but grief and pain, for promised joy!^{Robert Burns}

For most people New Year Resolutions soon become New Year Dissolutions as “*the road to hell is paved with good intentions!*” However it is good practice to review the past - re-living the good times and learning from the bad times. It is now the norm for all Emergency Services to hold a “*de-briefing*” after an incident to see how the Service can improve, to try to ensure nothing has been over-looked and also to provide pastoral care for those involved. We too can benefit from a review - to see how we can “*improve*” our faith, to try to ensure we have not “*over-looked*” anything in our walk with God and ensure that we are providing “*pastoral care*” i.e. we are encouraging one another by building each other up in the faith.

Peter wrote his letter to **Remind us of the basics of our faith;**^{2Pet.1:12} to **Refresh our memories of the Truth;**^{2Pet.1:13} and to help us to **Remember these things**^{2Pet.1:15} Over the year we have learnt (or at least tried to learn!) 12 verses of Scripture which help explain what God is like: **God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God the Creator, Sustainer, Provider, Saviour, Baptizer, Healer, Coming King, Lord and Redeemer.** This coming year we will learn 12 verses that will help us to **Pray Biblically.**

However well or poorly we can quote scripture, I believe that we can now all claim to be **Bible Literate** because we have a working knowledge of the Bible. To us the Bible is now a book through which God speaks to our hearts and by which we are moved. We now know that purpose of the Bible is to testify of Jesus and to reveal God’s plan of redemption to us. We also know that we are under the **New Covenant** which is based on a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are not under the Old Covenant which is based on a religion of rules, regulations and rituals. We have all had a basic instruction in the **3R’s of the Gospel: Repentance, Remission of sins and Righteousness.**

Repentance. The Greek word for *Repentance* is *metanoia* which means a *change of mind*. A Christian is someone who is prepared to look at the Truth and align their views to God’s view. Contrast this with a bigot who is intolerant of any ideas other than their own. Repentance is different from remorse (which is feeling sorry for being found out!) and true repentance changes lives but leaves no scars: *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.*^{Matt.3:8} *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*^{2Cor.7:10}

True repentance from sin will always include: Acknowledgement of the wrong. **Apology** for the wrong. **Action** of determination to change. **Appreciation** of God’s forgiveness. **Attitude** of grace, gratitude and gentleness towards God and people.

We have changed our minds about God as well as what He says about sin and ourselves and we now believe what God believes: *You should think in the same way Christ Jesus does.*^{Phil.2:5} *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (let your way of thinking be completely changed^{NIV}). Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*^{Rom.12:2} God is love;^{1Jn.4:16} He loves the

world,^{Jn.3:16} the Church^{Eph.5:25} and also us as individuals.^{Gal.2:20} This means that He is not angry with us anymore^{Is.54:9} because He has forgiven our sins: LORD, *who is a God like you? You forgive sin. You forgive your people when they do what is wrong. You don't stay angry forever. Instead, you take delight in showing your faithful love to them.*^{Micah 7:18} In fact God loves so much that He smiles upon us: *The LORD spoke to Moses. He said, 'Tell Aaron and his sons, Here is how I want you to bless the people of Israel. Say to them, "May the LORD bless you and take good care of you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD look on you with favour and give you his peace." In that way they will put the blessing of my name on the people of Israel. And I will bless them.*^{Nu.6:22-27} That certainly takes a change of thinking! But *woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, (what sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator.*^{NLT}^{Is.45:9}

Remission of Sins. Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.^{Lk.24:25-47} **Remission** means **dismissal** or **release** and is also translated **forgiveness** or **freedom**: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim **freedom** for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed **free**, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*^{Lk.4:18-19} **We know that that we are no longer joined to our sins because God has dismissed from them us.** For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him.^{Ps.103:111-113} **Yes those of us who believe in Jesus Christ are free from our sins!** Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.^{Acts13:38-39} If we forget that God has forgiven us all our past sins we will either live in the guilt of them or be oblivious of them and their consequences.^{2Pet.1:5-9}

Righteousness. The English word **Righteousness** means "**right-wise-ness**" - we are right with God and wise about it (i.e. we are acting upon the information). We are right with God when we **believe Him (trust Him)**. This trust is based on what we know about God – **His character** (what He has done in the past) and **His Word** (what He has said in the Scriptures). And because He does not change we have confidence to know He will be the same today and forever.^{Heb.13:8} *Christ didn't have any sin. But God made him become sin for us. So we can be made right with God because of what Christ has done for us.*^{2Cor.5:21} *But now God has shown us how to become right with him. The Law and the Prophets give witness to this. It has nothing to do with obeying the law. We are made right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. That happens to all who believe. It is no different for the Jews than for anyone else. Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God's glory. The free gift of God's grace makes all of us right with him. Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free. God gave him as a sacrifice to pay for sins. So he forgives the sins of those who have faith in his blood.*^{Rom.3:21-25}

When we know we are Righteous we will be bold: *the righteous are as bold as a lion.*^{Prov.28:1}
Bold to come to God: *So let us boldly approach the throne of grace. Then we will receive mercy. We will find grace to help us when we need it.*^{Heb.4:16}

Bold to proclaim Jesus: *"You can't be saved by believing in anyone else. God has given us no other name under heaven that will save us."* The leaders saw how bold Peter and John were. They also realized that Peter and John were ordinary men with no training. This surprised the leaders. They realized that these men had been with Jesus.^{Acts4:12-13}

Bold in our praying because we know our prayers are effective: *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*^{Jas.5:16} *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.*^{1Pet.3:12}

Let's make it our determination (not just a *good intention* or a *New Year resolution*) to continually **Remind one another of the basics of our faith;**^{2Pet.1:12} to **Refresh our memories of the Truth;**^{2Pet.1:13} and to help us to **Remember these things**^{2Pet.1:15}

We can (and will) do this by “stimulating one another to wholesome thinking”^{2Pet.3:1} **and recalling the words of Scripture.**^{2Pet.3:2}

Memory Verses

January. God the Father: *Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. 1Cor.8:6*

February. God the Son: *For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 2Cor.4:5*

March. God the Holy Spirit: *Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." Gal.4:6*

April. God the Creator: *Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. Is.40:28*

May. God the Sustainer: *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. Heb.1:3*

June. God the Provider: *He provided redemption for His people; He ordained His covenant forever — holy and awesome is His name. Ps.111:9*

July. God the Saviour: *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. Titus .3:4-5*

August. God the Baptizer: *John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Lk.3:16*

September. God the Healer: *"He himself bore our sins" in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by His wounds you have been healed." 1Pet.2:24*

October. God the Coming King: *Now to the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. 1Tim.1:17*

November. God the Lord: *Hallelujah! For our Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory unto Him! Rev.19:6-7*

December. God the Redeemer: *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us. Eph.1:7*

