

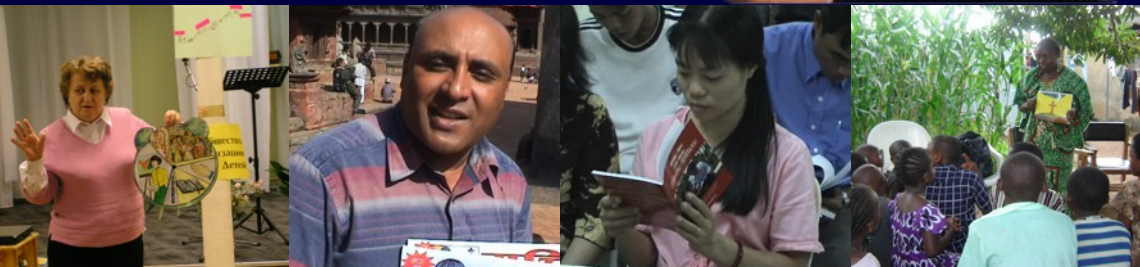
God's Word

for

God's Workers

A DAILY
DEVOTIONAL
GUIDE FOR
CHILDREN'S
WORKERS

Volume 2



SAM DOHERTY

GOD'S WORD
FOR
GOD'S WORKERS
Volume 2



*A book of daily meditations on the
Word of God written primarily
to help children's workers
in their devotional life.*

SAM DOHERTY

This publication is part of a series of devotional books for children's workers. The titles are:

"The Problems of a Children's Worker - and God's Solution"

"Obedience to the Heavenly Vision"

"Smooth Sailing in Personal Relationships and Leadership"

"50 Years and Still Learning"

"Salvation by Faith Alone"

"Truths for Teachers"

"God's Word for God's Workers Vol 1"

"God's Word for God's Workers Vol 2"

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INTRODUCTION

This book is the second volume of a series of daily devotionals to help children's workers in their daily Quiet Times. The first volume was well received and widely distributed. It contained a devotional for each day over a 6 month period. So this volume completes the year of 12 months with another 182 devotionals. I had two goals in writing these two books:

- First of all I wanted to help you and encourage you in your daily Quiet Time; and I trust that reading these devotionals and meditating upon them will be a great help for you and your spiritual life and growth each day.
- But, secondly, I knew that a number of those who receive and read these books have a teaching and preaching ministry to others. Perhaps you have the opportunity to share the Word of God with your co-workers or with those responsible to you. Or you may need to conduct a short series of Bible talks and devotionals with others. If so, I trust that the outlines in this book will help you in such a ministry. Please feel free to use them!

But I would like especially to emphasize how important it is for you to have a Quiet Time with God each day.

- What is a Quiet Time?
It is a time which you set apart each day to commune with God through Bible study, prayer and worship.
- When should you have it?
At the time which is most suitable. Most people have it first thing in the morning after or (better) before breakfast. Some find it better in the evening. But it is important that you have it at the same time each day.
- How long should it last?
There is no definite answer to this question. But I always suggest that you start off with a shorter time of, say, 15 minutes – and then you will find that this will increase quite normally and naturally as you see your increasing need to use more time. But it is difficult to be dogmatic because the quality of your Quiet Time is as important as its quantity.
- Where should you have it?
Wherever you can be on your own.
- What should you do in your Quiet Time?
I believe it should consist of three parts:

- ✓ First of all you should read a Bible verse or Bible passage and meditate upon it – and what it means for you for that day (and I trust that you will be able to use the daily devotionals in this book to help you in this aspect of your Quiet Time).

Is there a promise to claim or a command to obey or a warning to heed or a sin to confess, or an example to follow (or avoid)?

- ✓ Then, secondly, you should worship and praise God on the basis of what you have read and your resulting meditations.
- ✓ And, thirdly, you should pray and intercede for others and their needs and for yourself and your needs.

➤ Is there anything which will help you in your Quiet Time?

I believe there are several answers to this question.

- ✓ First of all make up your mind to have a Quiet Time each day – and decide when you will have it and where.
- ✓ While the Bible is the basis for your Quiet Time devotional books like this one can help you.
- ✓ You should use a notebook to remind you of who and what you should pray for.
- ✓ I would suggest that in this notebook you should have three lists:
 - A list of those people you will pray for every day. These will probably be your family members.
 - A short list of people you will pray for once each week. So you will need seven such lists – one for each day.
 - An emergency list of people and things which you will use each day for special prayer needs. Then when prayer is answered you can remove the request from the list. So this list is flexible.

This is the simplest method which many people have used and have found very helpful. I have found it to be invaluable.

If you have more time available and, if you have a wide range of people or things you should pray for, you could add monthly lists of those you will pray for – with a short list of each day of the month.

➤ Any last advice?

Yes – go ahead:

- ✓ If you haven't been having a regular Quiet Time start tomorrow (or better still today) – and I trust my books will be a help for you.
- ✓ If you already do have a daily, disciplined Quiet Time I trust that you will find my books a help and encouragement.

Week 1: Theme – The Fruit Of The Spirit I

Day 1

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15 v16).

The Lord Jesus makes it clear in our verse for today that He has chosen us primarily and most importantly so that we might bear fruit; and He also emphasizes that as we bear fruit our Father in Heaven will be glorified (John 15 v8). At the same time He tells us that we, ourselves, cannot produce fruit. Just as the orange grower or vineyard owner cannot by himself produce the oranges or grapes on his trees or plants, so we are equally helpless, and dependent on a power outside of ourselves. *“Without Me”,* says the Lord Jesus, *“you can do nothing”* (John 15 v5).

The Lord Jesus works in the lives of believers today through the Holy Spirit Whom He has given to every believer (John 7 v39; Acts 2 v38). It is therefore the Holy Spirit Who produces this fruit in the life of the believer. And that is why Paul calls this fruit, in Galatians 5 v22, the fruit of the Spirit.

The primary goal and purpose of the Holy Spirit Who indwells us is to produce fruit in our lives. So much emphasis has been placed in recent years on the gifts of the Spirit which are given for service and ministry; and the fruit of the Spirit has been somewhat neglected. But the Holy Spirit is more interested in our character than our service and the fruit of the Spirit grows on the tree of our character. The fruit of the Spirit determines the type of people we are rather than what we do and how well we teach or preach. The gifts of the Spirit are distributed to different Christians – one here and one there. The nine-fold fruit of the Spirit should be displayed to a lesser or greater extent in the lives and character of every Christian.

The nine-fold fruit of the Spirit gives first of all a picture of Jesus Christ. All of these were fully and perfectly displayed in His earthly life. But they also give a picture of what God wants us to be like in our character; and as we display these fruits more and more we will become more and more like the Lord Jesus.

We want to fulfil God's purpose for our lives and character. We want to be "*like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season*" (Psalm 1 v3). We want to be "*filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God*" (Philippians 1 v11).

Therefore we should pray today. "Oh, God, please help me to bear fruit in my life which will glorify You."

Day 2

"But now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5 v19-21).

Paul outlines the works of the flesh in Galatians 5 verses 19-21. He lists 17 of them and then adds "*and such like*" to indicate that there are more. These are "works" because they are the result of the person's own thoughts and activity. No one else is responsible for them except himself. These works, or at least some of them, characterize the unbeliever and are evidence that he will not "*inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5 v21b).

These works do not characterize the life of a believer – but it is possible for them to appear and be displayed from time to time in the life of the believer. That is why Paul exhorts us in verse 16 to "*walk in the Spirit*" so that we will not display any of these works. According to verse 17, if the flesh or old nature wins over the Spirit and our new nature we will display fleshly works; but if the Spirit and the new nature win we will display the fruit of the Spirit – and this is something different and much better than the works of the flesh. That is why verse 22 starts with the word BUT – to show the better and more glorious way of life.

There are two important truths about the fruit of the Spirit to remember:

- The growing of fruit is a process and not a crisis. It is something which happens slowly and gradually over a period of time, as we can see when we compare the growth of oranges in an orange grove or grapes in a vineyard. The growth is little by little, and step by step – and it is some time before the final manifestation can be seen.

This is surely why Paul uses the words, “*Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*” (Galatians 5 v16). He does not exhort us to run or to fly – but to walk. Walking is the slowest method of getting from one place to another. It takes time, patience and perseverance, and is a good illustration of our Christian lives and our bearing of fruit.

- We have emphasized over and over that the fruit of the Spirit is not produced by us, but by the Holy Spirit. However, this should not lead to inactivity on our part. We are not to “let go” and “let God”. Fruit bearing involves responsibility and the resulting fruit comes because of the co-operation between the “labourer” who follows the rules he has been given, and the One Who gives the growth. This is, of course, illustrated perfectly in any fruit orchard.

God gives the increase; but we are responsible to abide (John 15 v4), to plant and to water (1 Corinthians 3 v6, 7) and, above all, to walk in the Spirit. May we not neglect to do so.

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”
(Galatians 5 v16).

Day 3

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5 v22-23).

The Holy Spirit wants to produce His nine-fold fruit in our lives.

It is interesting that Paul uses the singular word “fruit” followed by nine descriptive words. It does not seem to be good grammar! There are several possible explanations of why he does this:

- All these nine fruits should be in each Christian – they should all be displayed in ONE person.
- Together the nine fruits make an organic whole and are closely linked. In other words it is really one fruit like, say, an orange which has inside it nine separate sections.
- The basic fruit of the Spirit is “love”, so the singular use is appropriate. The fruit of the Spirit is love!

Then the other eight fruits are displays, manifestations or elements of that love:

- ✓ Joy is love’s cheerfulness.
- ✓ Peace is love’s confidence.
- ✓ Longsuffering is love’s composure.
- ✓ Kindness is love’s consideration.
- ✓ Goodness is love’s character.

- ✓ Faithfulness is love's constancy.
- ✓ Meekness is love's comeliness.
- ✓ Self-control is love's conquest.

This is probably the reason why the word is used in the singular. The fruit of the Spirit is LOVE.

It is interesting to see that these nine fruits of the Spirit can be easily divided into three groups of three.

- The first three – love, joy and peace – show the relationship we should have to God and describe our personal walk with Him. They relate to our experience.
- The second three – longsuffering, gentleness and goodness – show the relationship we should have to other people and describe our public walk with others. They relate to our conduct.
- The third three – faithfulness, meekness and self-control – show the relationship we should have with ourselves and describe our private walk alone. They relate to our character.

May we see more and more of each of these precious fruits in our lives and may we be the kind of people God wants us to be – *“full of mercy and good fruits”* (James 3 v17).

Day 4

“The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Galatians 5 v22).

“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who was given to us” (Romans 5 v5).

Love is, as we have seen, the foundation, and the moving principle, of all the fruits of the Spirit. Love is not just an emotional feeling; it has a code of conduct which behaves well; it has a creed of faith which believes rightly.

Love is best described in 1 Corinthians 13 and you can see in this chapter how the other eight fruits of the Spirit are linked to this foundational fruit, and make it complete:

- The fruit of long suffering (*“Love suffers long”* 1 Corinthians 13 v4).
- The fruit of gentleness (*“Love is kind”* 1 Corinthians 13 v4).
- The fruit of meekness (*“Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up”* 1 Corinthians 13 v4).
- The fruit of self-control (*“Love does not behave rudely”* 1 Corinthians 13 v5).
- The fruit of peace (*“Love is not easily provoked”* 1 Corinthians 13 v5).
- The fruit of goodness (*“Love thinks no evil”* 1 Corinthians 13 v5).

➤ The fruit of joy (*"Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth"* 1 Corinthians 13 v6).

➤ The fruit of faith or faithfulness (*"Love believes all things"* 1 Corinthians 13 v7). We need to examine ourselves in the light of each of these statements and ask ourselves if we are displaying the fruit of love – as we should be.

God is love (1 John 4 v18). God the Father loved us so much He sent His Son to die for us (John 3 v16). God the Son loved us so much that He took the punishment for our sin on the Cross (Galatians 2 v20). And it is God the Holy Spirit Who, as our verse for today tells us, imparts the love of God to us.

This love of God which is a fruit of the Spirit, and which He imparts to us, can be described in three ways:

➤ It is received by us from God. He is our source (1 John 4 v16).

➤ It is returned by us to God. That is our response. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4 v19).

➤ It is reflected by us to others. That is our purpose:

✓ We are to love our fellow believers (1 Peter 1 v22).

✓ We are to love our neighbours (Matthew 22 v39).

✓ We are to love the unsaved (Romans 9 v3; 10 v1).

✓ We are to love our enemies (Matthew 5 v44).

Love like this is only possible when it is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit as His first and special fruit – as our second verse for today tells us. It does not come naturally.

Therefore we are to pray and ask God to fill our hearts and lives with His love for God Himself and for others.

Day 5

"The fruit of the Spirit is joy" (Galatians 5 v22).

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1 v6).

There is a story of a boy who told his mother that their donkey was a Christian. His mother was, of course, surprised at this and asked him how he knew. Her son replied, "He has got such a long face!"

We may laugh at this but there is an element of truth in what the boy said. Unfortunately many Christians do not look especially happy! Perhaps we can understand the man who said that he didn't want to become a Christian because he had enough problems of his own!

And yet Christians are exhorted in the Bible to *"rejoice in the Lord"* (Philippians 3 v1) and we are told that it is God's will for us to *"rejoice evermore"* (1

Thessalonians 5 v16). Indeed the subject of joy is the central theme of one of the New Testament books (Philippians).

Joy is not just happiness, which depends on circumstances. It is something deep in the believer's heart which enables him to be at rest and contented even in the midst of difficult circumstances. And so James tells us that we should *"count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations or testings"* (James 1 v2). Indeed the Bible goes further and tells us that *"the joy of the Lord is your strength"* (Nehemiah 8 v10). This joy which the Lord gives makes us strong.

How can we have this joy? It comes from the Lord – and specifically from the Holy Spirit. It is a fruit of the Spirit. It is a fruit which He causes to appear, to grow and to ripen on the branches of our trees! The fruit of joy was the experience of the Thessalonian believers in the midst of their afflictions as our second verse for today tells us – and it came from the Holy Spirit.

And if we want this joy – and ask God for it – He will give it to us. Paul emphasizes over and over again that our joy, our rejoicing, should be in the Lord (Philippians 3 v1; 3 v3; 4 v4; 4 v10) which comes from Him alone:

- Joy was the experience of the Lord Jesus – even in the shadow of Calvary: *"These things have I spoken unto you that MY JOY might remain in you"* (John 15 v11).
- Joy was the experience of the apostles in the midst of their suffering: *"Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"* (Acts 5 v41).
- Joy is the privilege and strength of every believer and the Holy Spirit wants to give us that fruit and help us to grow. And it will grow
 - ✓ when we are sure that God is keeping us and protecting us (1 Peter 1 v6).
 - ✓ when we realize that we are saved for ever (1 Peter 1 v8, 9).
 - ✓ when we remember that our names are written in Heaven (Luke 10 v20).

Day 6

"The fruit of the Spirit is peace" (Galatians 5 v22).

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14 v27).

We all live in a world racked with pain, hurt, worry, confusion and anguish of all kinds. Few experience real peace, and even among Christians there are many who are so burdened with worry, pressure and stress that they have little or no peace. And yet God wants all His children to have and to enjoy His peace, which is given to us as a fruit of the Spirit.

The Bible teaches three great truths about peace.

- God is peace. Peace is an attribute of God. He is the God of peace (Philippians 4 v9). He is never upset, worried, or frustrated. And He is the source of all real peace.
- God made peace. Mankind was estranged from God and at enmity with Him. And our sin made it impossible for us to be accepted by Him. Jesus Christ came to die on the Cross and take the punishment we deserved for our sin. By doing so He made peace between God and man:
".... having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 2 v20).
The way was now open for sinners to come to God, through Jesus Christ, and when we trust Him we are justified and have peace with God:
"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5 v1).
Peace with God is a positional truth – not an experimental truth. Every Christian is at peace with God – no matter how he feels.
- God gives peace.
But God wants also to give each of His children the gift of peace – an experimental peace – which can fill our hearts at all times and in every situation. But not every Christian enjoys this peace.
Yet it is a special gift which the Lord Jesus offers to each of us today in addition to the two gifts we have already received – the gift of eternal life (John 3 v16) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2 v4a). It is the gift of His peace as our second verse for today tells us.
 - ✓ He tells us that it is not like the "peace" which the world gives:
 - His peace is deep. The world's "peace" is superficial.
 - His peace is independent of circumstances. The world's "peace" depends upon circumstances.
 - His peace lasts. The world's "peace" is temporary.
 - His peace is free. The world's "peace" is expensive.
 - ✓ He assures us in this verse that His peace takes away trouble and fear.Do you have this peace? It comes from the Lord Jesus and is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit as one of His special fruits. Ask Him for it – and take it as a gift.

Day 7

"The fruit of the Spirit is ... peace" (Galatians 5 v22).

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4 v6, 7).

We return to yesterday's subject because it is so important for us as believers to receive and enjoy the legacy of Jesus Christ to us – His gift of peace.

How can we enjoy this peace?

This peace does not come automatically. It has to be sought, longed for and prayed for (Psalm 34 v14). A gift is not ours unless we take steps, such as those which follow, to receive it:

➤ **Think about God**

When a problem comes we need to direct our thoughts towards God – not towards the problem, or ourselves, or other people. We need to remember firstly that He is sovereign and in complete control of every circumstance; and then, secondly, that He loves us and cares for us and that He only sends or allows those things which are for our good (Romans 8 v28).

The Bible says, *"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You"* (Isaiah 26 v3).

The more we think about Him and focus on Him, the more we will enjoy His peace.

➤ **Talk to God**

In every difficult situation (and indeed in any situation) our priority should not be to talk to other people about our problem, but to come to God and talk to Him about it. And our second verse for today tells us that if we do this He will give us the peace of God. He may remove the problem; or even allow it to remain, but He will give us His special grace to have peace in the problem.

The more we talk to Him, the more we will enjoy His peace.

➤ **Throw your problem or worry onto the Lord**

This sounds strange doesn't it? But this is what the Bible tells us to do.

"Casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5 v7).

- ✓ What are we to do? CAST (or throw) every worry or problem onto our Lord.
- ✓ What are we to throw? EVERY care! The word "care" here means "worry".
- ✓ Why should we do this? Because He CARES for us. This word "care" is different from the first word "care". It means that He loves us and wants the best for us.

The more we throw our problems onto Him (and leave them there), the more we will enjoy His Peace.

"The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace" (Psalm 29 v11).

Week 2:

Theme – The Fruit Of The Spirit II

Day 1

“The fruit of the Spirit is ... Longsuffering” (Galatians 5 v22)

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (Colossians 3 v12 and 13).

The first three fruits of the Spirit – love, joy and peace – deal with our relationship to God. The next three – longsuffering, gentleness and goodness – deal with our relationship with other people.

➤ **What is longsuffering?**

“It is an ability to endure, hold on, and put up with the weaknesses and irritations of others.” This definition is supported by our second verse for today. This is part of the new clothes we are to put on! We are not to be hasty, short tempered or impatient with others.

“It is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not quickly retaliate or immediately punish.”

➤ **Who is our example?**

- ✓ The Bible teaches us that God is longsuffering with us (2 Peter 3 v9 and 15). Longsuffering is one of God's attributes. If He wasn't, we wouldn't, or couldn't, be saved. He was patient with us when we were unsaved (Romans 2 v4); and He is patient and longsuffering with us as Christians when we make so many mistakes.
- ✓ The Lord Jesus was longsuffering when He was here on this earth. Peter writes about His reaction to those who just before His death reviled Him (1 Peter 2 v23). He says that He did not revile them, nor did He threaten them, even though He was completely innocent. Instead he *“committed Himself to Him Who judges righteously”*. He left everything in God's hands. And in the preceding verses Peter tells us that He is our example and that we should follow in His steps. So, when we suffer for

something good we have done, we should take that suffering patiently – as He did.

There are some situations in our lives when we feel that we are “at the end of our tether” and we cannot go on. But “*Love suffers long*” (1 Corinthians 13 v4). There are some people we feel we just cannot work with any more. But “*love suffers long*” (1 Corinthians 13 v4).

It is not easy to be longsuffering. We cannot do it in our own strength. But it is a fruit of the Spirit. He can enable us to do it. That is why Paul prayed for the Colossian believers that they would be “*strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power onto all patience and longsuffering*” (Colossians 1 v11). And we need to pray the same prayer for ourselves.

Day 2

“The fruit of the Spirit is ...gentleness” (Galatians 2 v22).

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient” (2 Timothy 2 v24).

Gentleness or kindness is the outworking and complement of longsuffering. Paul writes, “*Love suffers long and is kind*” (1 Corinthians 13 v4).

When we are gentle we are thoughtful and kind; we are sensitive to the feelings of others; and we avoid anything in our attitude or words which would hurt:

- Gentleness or kindness is an attribute of God. Paul writes in Ephesians 2 v7 of “*the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.*”
- Jesus Christ was gentle when He was here on earth. Paul writes about the “*meekness and gentleness of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10 v1).
- Many great men of God have been kind and gentle. Joseph was kind (Genesis 50 v21); Moses was kind (Exodus 2 v12). David was kind (2 Samuel 9 v1). The Bible says that it was David’s gentleness or kindness which made him great (2 Samuel 22 v36).
- God wants us to be gentle and kind to everyone, even those who hurt us. Our verse for today makes this very clear:
 - ✓ We are servants – servants of the Lord Jesus Christ primarily but also servants of people.
 - ✓ We must not strive. As servants of the Lord we have dignity, and we must never lose that dignity by fighting or quarreling with other people.
 - ✓ We must be gentle. The Lord Jesus expects His servants to be gentle at all times. What does this word “gentle” mean? It is only used one other time in the New Testament – in 1 Thessalonians 2 v7 where Paul

writes *"We were gentle among you just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children."*

This is the picture Paul gives to describe what it means to be gentle – the picture of a nursing mother and her little baby. We are to be gentle like that.

- ✓ We must be gentle to all men – not just to our friends but to those who hurt us. It is easy to be gentle to those who are gentle to us, but desperately difficult to be gentle to those who are nasty and critical. We cannot do this on our own. That's why it's called a fruit of the Spirit. It is a quality which He produces in us when we really want it, pray for it, and trust the Holy Spirit to do it.

Paul also reminds us that an important part of kindness or gentleness is a willingness to forgive those who have hurt us and sinned against us.

"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4 v32).

May God help us to produce this fruit for His glory – to be kind and gentle to everyone.

Day 3

"The fruit of the Spirit is ...goodness" (Galatians 2 v22).

"For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord" (Acts 11 v24a).

- What is goodness? Goodness has two aspects:
 - ✓ A good person is good in his character.
 - ✓ A good person is good or beneficial or helpful in his actions which are the result of his character. Goodness is not just passive. It is active.
- God is good.

Goodness is one of God's main attributes and is closely linked to His love:

"Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 106 v1).

He is good in both senses outlined above:

"You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes" (Psalm 119 v68).

He is perfectly good in His nature and He is perfectly good in His actions. And the Lord Jesus was good. He is the good Shepherd (John 10 v11) and He went about doing good (Acts 10 v38).

- God wants us to be good.

He wants us to be good in our character and good in our actions, and if we are we will receive His commendation, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25 v21).

We read of two good men in the Bible:

- ✓ Joseph of Arimathea was a good man (Luke 23 v50).
He was, we read, just and honourable in his character; and he displayed his goodness in his actions by opposing the decision of those who crucified the Lord Jesus and by giving his tomb for the burial of His body.
- ✓ Barnabas, as we read in today's verse, was a good man. He was good in his character and nature; and he was good in his actions.
His goodness was displayed and demonstrated by his generosity, when he sold his land and gave the proceeds to the early church, by his encouragement and help to Saul (Acts 9 v27 and 11 v25) and later to John Mark (Acts 15 v39) and by his humble spirit when he handed over the leadership of the little missionary team to Paul (compare Acts 13 v2 and 13 v13, and 13 v46).

➤ How can we be good like them?

Goodness is a fruit of the Spirit. It is something which He enables us to be and do. This fact is borne out by our second verse which tells us that Barnabas was filled with the Holy Ghost. That is why he was so good. It was not a normal quality of his life. It was a supernatural quality and ability which was given to him, or "grown on his tree" by the Holy Spirit.

"For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth" (Ephesians 5 v9).

Day 4

"The fruit of the Spirit is ...faith (faithfulness)" (Galatians 5 v22).

"They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3 v23).

We have completed the second group of three fruits of the Spirit. Longsuffering, gentleness and goodness deal with our relationship to others.

The last three fruits are directed more towards ourselves and the three qualities which God wants us to have, which will help us in our personal growth and ministry. He wants us to be faithful, meek and self-controlled.

The first of these three is faith. And most commentators believe that this could best be regarded, in the context, as faithfulness. This is closely related to faith or trust – and it simply means that we can be trusted.

- Faithfulness is one of God's attributes as our second verse for today reminds us.

When we understand, from the Bible, that God is faithful, and when we really believe this truth, we can come to three conclusions:

- ✓ He is faithful to His people. He never lets us down. He can be completely trusted at all times.
- ✓ He is faithful to His plans. He always accomplishes His purposes – and can be completely trusted to do so.
- ✓ He is faithful to His promises. He always keeps His Word; and we can always trust Him to do so.
- In our world today there is little faithfulness:
 - ✓ People are often not faithful to each other and frequently let each other down. This can be seen in many broken marriages.
 - ✓ People don't carry through with what they should do.
 - ✓ People are often not honest and don't keep their promises.
- God wants us His people to be faithful – and He has given us His Holy Spirit so that the fruit of faithfulness can be developed on the tree of our life:
 - ✓ He wants us to be faithful to each other and not to let people (or Himself) down. We should be completely dependable.
 - ✓ He wants us to be faithful to our ministry – and to keep doing what God has called us to do.
 - ✓ He wants us to be honest, to keep our promises and to be faithful to our words and commitments. And this includes paying our bills and meeting our obligations.

"Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4 v2).

As we display this fruit of faithfulness in our lives we can look forward to our Master's commendation:

"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (Matthew 25 v21).

Day 5

"The fruit of the Spirit is ...meekness" (Galatians 2 v22).

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11 v29).

➤ **What does meekness mean?**

God expects meekness from us – in two ways:

- ✓ Our meekness to God. This is an inward spirit of quietness which exercises faith in God without dispute or resistance.
- ✓ Our meekness to people. This is a calmness of spirit, neither elated or cast down, which is the opposite of violence or anger.

This meekness is not weakness. It is the very opposite – it is an evidence of strength. We see, for example, in Numbers 12 v3 that Moses was very meek – above all the men which were upon the face of the earth – and yet he was a tower of strength and stability.

➤ **What is God like?**

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was meek. Meekness was one of His outstanding attributes. Our second verse for today tells us He was meek and lowly in heart, and it also encourages us to be meek like Him so that we can find rest. Matthew 21 v5 illustrates His meekness by the humble way He entered Jerusalem. And we read in 1 Peter 2 v22, 23 how meekly He responded when cruel men hurt Him dreadfully. He is, Peter writes, our example.

➤ **What should we be like?**

The Bible tells us that God expects us to be meek – both in our relationship to Him and in our reactions to other people:

- ✓ Peter links meekness with quietness. We should have a “*meek and quiet spirit*” (1 Peter 3 v4).
- ✓ Paul links meekness with gentleness – “*gentle, showing meekness to all men*” (Titus 3 v2).
- ✓ And he links it also with humility “*with all lowliness and humility*” (Ephesians 4 v2).

Someone has said that the branches of a fruit tree which bear the most fruit are those which are closest to the ground!

Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit to which is attached a number of special promises of blessing both now and in the future:

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5 v5).

“The meek shall eat and be satisfied” (Psalm 22 v26).

“The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37 v11).

But we see again that it is not normal or natural to be meek. Only the Holy Spirit can give us this quality and our prayer should be that both God and people will see this fruit grow on our trees.

Day 6

*"The fruit of the Spirit is ...temperance (self-control)" (Galatians 2 v22).
 " And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate (self - controlled) in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9 v25a).*

This ninth fruit is, perhaps, the most difficult of all to achieve – and, at the same time, is probably the most needed.

➤ **What does it mean?**

The word "temperance" in the King James Bible should be translated self-control.

Self-control is the ability to restrain yourself from saying something you should not say, and from doing something you should not do.

The Christian should be "master of himself", and able to control his appetites, emotions, thoughts, words and deeds. And as one dear friend of mine used to say, "that's desperately difficult." I feel we could go further and say, "That's completely impossible" – at least in our own strength. That is why it is a fruit of the Spirit – and is the result of His work and help.

➤ **Who should have this fruit?**

The Bible teaches that every Christian should be able to exercise and display self-control:

- ✓ Leaders in the church should be self-controlled (Titus 1 v8).
- ✓ All believers should possess this quality of self-control (2 Peter 1 v6).
- ✓ Self-control is an essential quality for every Christian "athlete" (1 Corinthians 9 v25), as our second verse for today reminds us.

➤ **Where can I best demonstrate self-control?**

Self-control is especially important, and especially needed, with regard to my words and what I say to other people:

- ✓ The control of my words indicates wisdom (Proverbs 10 v19).
- ✓ The control of my words avoids trouble (Proverbs 21 v23).
- ✓ The control of my words shows how spiritual I am (James 3 v2).
- ✓ The lack of control of my words shows a lack of spirituality (James 1 v26).

This is why James exhorts us to be "*slow to speak*" (James 1 v19) and this is why David prayed:

"I said, 'I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me.' " (Psalm 39 v1).

And Peter writes, "*He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit*" (1 Peter 3 v10).

That is self-control. It is a fruit of the Spirit and, as we trust Him and His power, He will encourage the growth of this fruit in our lives (and on our lips) – and everyone will see it!

Day 7

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (John 15 v4).

In this last meditation on the fruit of the Spirit we will look at the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning this fruit in the fifteenth chapter of John’s Gospel:

- **The agents in fruit bearing**
 - ✓ God the Father is the husbandman or vinedresser (verse 1). He tends the branches and where needed prunes them.
 - ✓ The Lord Jesus is the Vine (verse 1).
 - ✓ The Holy Spirit is obviously the sap or life of the vine – the unseen power which works “behind the scenes” (verse 26).
 - ✓ We are the branches on which the fruit of the Spirit grows – Christlikeness of character, conduct and conversation. We have been chosen and saved with the primary purpose of bearing fruit (verse 16).
- **The purpose of fruit bearing**
 - ✓ The fruit that we bear glorifies God (verse 8) when it is seen in our lives.
 - ✓ The fruit that we bear helps and serves others. The branches do not eat the fruit, others do. We read in Genesis 49 v22 that Joseph is “*a fruitful bough whose branches run over the wall.*” This is what God wants us to be – so that people on the other side of the wall see, and even receive, the fruit and are touched by the Holy Spirit.
- **The quantity of fruit**

The quantity may vary from person to person – and also from time to time in one person’s life:

 - ✓ All branches should bear fruit (verse 2a).
 - ✓ Some branches bear more fruit (verse 2b).
 - ✓ Other branches bear much fruit (verse 8).
- **The conditions for fruit bearing**

There are two necessary conditions:

 - ✓ We must be in the vine, and a branch of it. We must be alive with the life of Christ in us, conveyed by the Holy Spirit – and not just a dead

piece of wood. We receive this life and become part of the vine when we trust Jesus Christ as our Saviour. This is UNION with Christ.

- ✓ We must "abide in Christ". The word "abide" is used ten times in seven verses in this chapter. To abide in Him means to live in close fellowship with Him, through His Word (verses 3 and 7) – so that He through the Holy Spirit can work in us and produce the fruit He wants to see. This is COMMUNION with Christ.

The more we abide, and the closer we are to Him, the more fruit will the Holy Spirit produce in us and on our branches – and we will be like "*a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season*" (Psalm 1 v3).



Galations 5:22,23

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

Week 3: Theme – The Beatitudes I

Day 1

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him” (Matthew 5 v1)

The Sermon on the Mount as contained in Matthew’s Gospel chapters 5, 6 and 7 is probably the best known part of the Bible, and it is the longest recorded discourse of our Lord.

There are several introductory facts to note concerning this wonderful sermon:
THE PLACE:- It was delivered on a mountain side (Mark 5 v1) – not in a temple or church but just on the side of an ordinary mountain.

THE POSTURE:- The Lord Jesus was seated (Matthew 5 v1) like a King on a throne or a Judge on a bench, speaking with authority (Matthew 7 v29).

THE PLAN:- He did not only speak, He taught them (Matthew 5 v2) with clear enunciation and complete liberty (Matthew 5 v2).

THE PEOPLE:- He addressed the people as a whole, both believers and unbelievers (Matthew 7 v28). He especially spoke to His disciples (Matthew 5 v1).

THE PURPOSE:-

What is the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount? Why did the Lord Jesus give us this long and wonderful discourse?

- IT IS NOT a system of rules and regulations which must be obeyed to become a Christian and be accepted by God. That is the false viewpoint of those who believe in a social gospel.
- IT IS NOT an outline of principles to be followed in some future kingdom or millennium. These principles are for the present.
- IT IS NOT an idealistic picture of mankind, with standards which are so high as to be completely unattainable, with this thought that it should not be taken seriously and can be completely ignored.
- IT IS a description of the lifestyle which should be aimed at in this present age by those who are citizens of, and belong to, the kingdom of heaven, and who have from their conversion onwards acknowledged the rule or reign of God in their lives. It outlines the qualities of those citizens, and includes warnings of what they should avoid.

As we read this sermon, we see how far short we fall of God's standards. But this should not lead to despair. Instead we should see it as a challenge to become what He wants us to be; and He will help us to obey what He says to us, as we submit to His authority.

Consequently, as we study the Beatitudes, which make up the first part of this Sermon, we should ask ourselves two questions:

"What does this Sermon mean to me?"

"Where do the principles of this Sermon come in my thoughts and life?"

Day 2

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32 v1)

The first section of the Sermon on the Mount is known as the Beatitudes. These are eight statements made by the Lord Jesus which outline the qualities He wants to see in our lives as believers. The purpose of the beatitudes is three-fold:

- They show us, first of all, how to enter the kingdom of heaven. Before anyone can be saved he must be conscious of his spiritual poverty (Matthew 5 v3), convicted of his sinfulness (Matthew 5 v4), and conscious of his inability to save himself (Matthew 5 v5).
- They show us how to live as Christians – displaying humility (verse 3), repentance (verse 4), meekness (verse 5), hunger and thirst (verse 6), mercy (verse 7), purity (verse 8), peace-making (verse 9), identification with the Lord and His sufferings (verses 10 -12). All of these should describe the believers, "BE-ATTITUDES". They constitute the goals which God sets before us – the goals at which we should aim.
- They show us how to be happy. All mankind is engaged in a great search for happiness – and here in these verses we have the answer. They give a true description of a happy life.

The word "blessed" which begins each beatitude means "happy" – but it is a happiness which is not just emotional or dependent upon circumstances. It is a happiness or joy which comes from God and is His blessing on those who fulfill the condition given no matter what the circumstances.

This happiness does not come, as the world believes, from possessions, pleasure, power or popularity. The Lord Jesus does not say, "Blessed are the rich for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The ingredients He gives for happiness are unappealing to the world and to carnal mankind. Those who

follow His directions leave themselves open to the ridicule and pity of the world but they are truly happy and the most blessed people.

True happiness is based not on externals but on a right heart relationship with God. It starts with salvation and the forgiveness of our sins as explained in our verse for today. And it continues with the development in our lives of the eight qualities the Lord Jesus outlines in the beatitudes.

These eight qualities are not descriptions of eight different people or types of people, but all of them should be present in all Christians to a lesser or greater extent. Christians differ in many respects – but we should all display these qualities. However they are not natural or normal but are all God given. It is He Who helps us develop them in our lives. Therefore we should pray for them, seek for them and do all we can to make them a reality. We could ask ourselves a question at this moment:

“What eight qualities do I most want to see developed in my life?” Would the qualities outlined in the beatitudes be my answer ... and your answer?

Day 3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5 v3)

It is significant that the first beatitude which proclaims God’s blessing on the poor in spirit is the basis for all those beatitudes which follow:

- **What does it say?**
 - ✓ The unbeliever who is poor in spirit trusts Jesus Christ and enters the kingdom of heaven.
 - ✓ The believer who is poor in spirit is a blessed and happy citizen of the kingdom of heaven.
- **What does it not mean?**
 - ✓ It does not mean to be financially poor.
 - ✓ It does not mean to be poor spirited, with no drive or enthusiasm.
 - ✓ It does not mean to be shy and retiring.
 - ✓ It does not mean to have a bad self-image.
 - ✓ It does not mean some kind of false self-demeaning humility.
- **What does it mean?**

The word “spirit” here refers to independence, self-reliance and self-assurance. Poor in spirit therefore means the opposite – a conviction that “I cannot do it myself!” A person who is poor in spirit is someone who sees his weakness, his helplessness, and his spiritual need. He realizes that he

is spiritually bankrupt, and that he is empty handed before God. Such a person can only ask God for mercy and help.

This is the first beatitude, because it is only when a person sees his spiritual bankruptcy or poverty, his helplessness and his need, that he is ready to take that first step towards blessedness and happiness and trust Jesus Christ as his Saviour, enter the kingdom of heaven and become rich in Christ.

This first beatitude is therefore the key to all the others which follow.

But this poverty of spirit is a quality which, while it enables a sinner to take that first step in entering the kingdom of Heaven, should be an abiding quality in those who are already citizens of that kingdom. The believer needs to see his continued need of Jesus Christ. He continues to say, "Of myself I am nothing, I have nothing, I can do nothing, and I need all things." And then the believer needs to see that he is rich in Christ and that through Christ all his needs are met (Philippians 4 v19).

- ✓ He is in the kingdom of heaven because he saw his poverty of spirit – and this poverty of spirit shows he is in that kingdom.
- ✓ He is a happy citizen of that kingdom because he continues to see his poverty of spirit and because he sees his wonderful inheritance in Christ. He is "*rich in faith and heir of the kingdom which God has promised to those that love Him*" (James 2 v5b).

Do you have that poverty of spirit?

Day 4

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"

(Matthew 5 v4).

At first glance this seems a strange statement. How can mourners be happy? Do the two words not contradict each other?

➤ **What does it mean to mourn?**

Mourning is grief and sorrow caused by a profound loss of some kind. It is usually associated with death – the most painful loss of all. But it can also be related to the loss of a job, the failure of an examination, or serious disappointment. For those of us who mourn in any of these ways, there is the promise of comfort – through the Scriptures (Romans 15 v4, 5), the Spirit of God (John 14 v16) or through other saints (Acts 4 v36; Romans 12 v8). And the end result can be happiness even in these circumstances.

But that is not the mourning meant by the Lord Jesus here. He is speaking about life in the kingdom of Heaven. He has just spoken about poverty of

spirit. And in the light of these two statements He is clearly referring here to a spiritual mourning.

However it should be emphasized that in the midst of the mourning mentioned earlier, the Lord Jesus does give peace and a lasting joy.

➤ **What does mourning mean here?**

The person who mourns in his spirit is mourning because of his sinfulness and poverty of spirit. This beatitude follows logically from the first one. Excusing our sin, or ignoring our sin does not bring happiness. But a sensitivity to sin, and a true heart conversion from sin, will eventually lead to comfort and real happiness. The grace of God melts the human heart, gives a right attitude to sin, and leads to a mourning for sin.

This mourning for sin, like poverty of spirit, is involved in the initial step of trusting Jesus Christ as Saviour. It leads to repentance and, in turn, to faith – and these bring the comfort spoken about in today's verse.

But this mourning for sin should be a continuing feature of the believer's life. He sees the sin in his life and is sorry for it; he sees the sin in the lives of others and is sorry for it; he sees the sin in the world and is sorry for it. But he does not wallow in self-reproach or condemnation. He decides to do something about it.

- ✓ Firstly, he confesses it and is thankful for the promise of God in 1 John 1 v9 promising him forgiveness. In this way he, the mourner, is according to our verse for today, comforted.
- ✓ Secondly, he asks God to help him overcome sin in the future (Romans 7 v24, 25) – and this also brings him comfort.

The one who mourns for his sinfulness receives a two-fold comfort:

- ✓ The comfort of the Scriptures (Romans 15 v4, 5). The Word of God shows him God's grace, forgiveness and power.
- ✓ The comfort of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (John 14 v16) Who subjectively imparts to him the comfort he needs.

Day 5

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth “ (Matthew 5 v5).

This beatitude tells us that God blesses and gives happiness to the meek and not to the haughty, forward, arrogant or aggressive.

It seems incredible to associate happiness and an earthly inheritance with meekness. The world feels that happiness and wealth are obtained by ability,

strength, power, self-assurance, self-assertion, and the pushing and promotion of self. This beatitude completely contradicts that philosophy. Yet this challenge to be meek is found in many places in the Word of God. Paul teaches it (Galatians 5 v22, 23); James teaches it (James 1 v21); Peter teaches it (1 Peter 3 v15) and the Lord Jesus both teaches it and demonstrates it (Matthew 11 v28, 29).

➤ **What is meekness not?**

It is not weakness, laziness, cowardice or lack of spirit. Instead it is always linked with high spirits, courage and great strength.

➤ **What is meekness?**

"Meekness is the ability to submit oneself to the Lord, on the one hand, and to be gentle with sinners on the other."

"Meekness is power under control."

This type of meekness can be seen most clearly in the life of Moses who was certainly not weak or timid but is described in the Bible as the *" meekest of men "* (Numbers 12 v3). Of course the Lord Jesus was the most courageous of men ever.

There is no more beautiful quality in a Christian than meekness. It is probably the most difficult of the Beatitudes to achieve. There is a progression involved here. First of all I need to be poor-spirited, and then I need to "mourn" over my sin. But those two qualities are related more to myself. This third quality of meekness is related to others and what they say and do. And that can be difficult.

➤ **What is the result of meekness?**

The meek, this beatitude tells us, are those who *"inherit the earth"*.

- ✓ We will not be afraid of anyone or anything because we will know that God is in control.
- ✓ We will reign in peace over ourselves and our circumstances through His power.
- ✓ We will not seek anything for ourselves but we will receive and possess all things (2 Corinthians 6 v10) and want nothing (James 1 v4).
- ✓ We will not fret or fight. We will simply submit to God and wait, knowing His timing is perfect.
- ✓ We will one day judge the world (1 Corinthians 6 v2) and reign with Him (2 Timothy 2 v12).

➤ **How can we be meek?**

The Lord Jesus has said that He will enable us to be meek if we *"take His yoke upon us and learn of Him"* (Matthew 11 v29).

Day 6

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5 v6).

This fourth Beatitude follows logically after the first three, which focus primarily upon man’s need and his problems – to be poor in spirit, conscious of sin and meek towards God and man. But this fourth beatitude gives a solution to his needs and problems. If he hungers and thirsts after righteousness he will be filled, and his needs will all be met. This fourth beatitude especially offers the solution to man’s great need by pointing to God’s remedy in Jesus Christ.

What is righteousness?

The Bible teaches us that there are three kinds of righteousness:

- Imputed righteousness or justification which is received once and for all at the moment of trusting Jesus Christ as Saviour, and saves from the penalty of sin.
- Imparted righteousness or sanctification which develops step by step and little by little throughout the Christian life and saves from the power of sin.
- Imperishable or eternal righteousness or glorification which is received at the moment of a believer’s death, and he becomes completely like Jesus Christ. This saves him from the presence of sin.

How can a person receive this three-fold righteousness?

- A sinner must desire righteousness. And this promise tells us that if he hungers and thirsts for it and puts his trust in Jesus Christ he *“will be filled”*. He will be fully and eternally justified, all his sin will be forgiven.
- A believer needs to desire righteousness. He has already received an imputed righteousness and God sees him as perfect as His Son Jesus Christ. But he needs to become more righteous in his daily life; and he needs to hunger and thirst after this imparted righteousness. He is not to hunger and thirst after blessedness but after righteousness and holiness. If he does so he will be filled – and the result will be blessedness. Bread and water are not luxuries. Our physical life depends on them so we desire them and really want them. Righteousness is not a luxury. Our spiritual life depends on it – and we should desire it and really want it. This desire, this hunger and thirst, is a good sign and indicates spiritual health. How much do we really want it? Are we like hungry men who long for food, or thirsty men who long for water? If we really want it, we will get it; we will be filled. We will be more holy and more happy.
- Our Lord’s command is, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6 v33).

- Our Lord's promise is, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst"* (John 6 v35).

Day 7

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5 v7).

This is a Beatitude which has been misinterpreted by some people who conclude that God's mercy or salvation is the **result** of our mercy to others. This could not be true. This would mean that we are saved by our good works – which would be a complete contradiction of biblical teaching.

The mercy which we show is not because of the mercy we receive; it is the result and evidence of it. Those who have received mercy when they trusted Jesus Christ as their Saviour will, in turn, show mercy to others as a general practice or way of life. If they don't do so, it is proof or evidence that they have not themselves received mercy.

This is equally true concerning the forgiveness of sins as taught by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6 v12-15 and Matthew 18 v23-35. God's forgiveness of sins is not the result of our forgiveness of others; but our forgiveness of others is the result or evidence of God's forgiveness of us.

This fifth beatitude follows logically from the previous four. While all the beatitudes describe the character of the Christian or disciple, there is a development or sequence in them. The first three prepare the way for the fourth which deals with the reception of God's righteousness. Having received that righteousness we become more and more like God – and the first way we do that is by showing mercy to others, as God shows mercy to us. The Lord Jesus, when He was here on earth, practiced mercy, taught mercy and commanded His followers to show mercy.

What is mercy?

"Mercy is doing what you can to restore dignity to someone whose life has been broken by sin (his own or another's).

"Mercy has the power to retaliate and hurt the one who has hurt us – but doesn't."

I especially like the second definition. God was merciful to me. He had the power to punish me for all my sin against Him – but He didn't. If the grace of God gives me what I don't deserve, then the mercy of God does not give me what I do deserve. In mercy God withholds His judgment and punishment.

And He wants me to display that same mercy to others. If I am merciful, I do not give to those who hurt me what they deserve. Instead I forgive them.

As a Christian I should have, as we stated earlier, a merciful spirit. But there are times when I don't show that mercy the way I should, and if that happens I, as a child of God lose the blessing of God on my life and ministry. God responds to His children as they respond to others. But, as I become more and more merciful I will as a child of God receive more and more blessing. I will find that mercy to others brings joy, liberation and even good health to myself. "*Blessed (or happy) are the merciful.*"

And, if I don't display it as I should, the opposite will happen.



Psalm 32:1,2

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to
whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and
in whose spirit there is no deceit. "*

Week 4:

Theme – The Beatitudes II

Day 1

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”

(Matthew 5 v8).

This beatitude seems even more difficult for us to obtain or realize than any of the others.

What does this beatitude mean? It needs to be understood in two ways:

- All believers are already pure in heart in the sight of God. This purity is not their own. It is the purity of Jesus Christ imputed to them when they trusted Him as their Saviour. At that moment we were eternally justified, made pure and righteous in the sight of God.

Therefore we will all, on the basis of this promise, see God.

- God also wants to give us an imparted purity which is our own although it comes from Him. Imparted purity is a life-long, step-by-step, process.

Therefore God wants us to become more and more pure in heart as a part of our everyday life and relationships. The Bible tells us in 1 John 3 v3 that *“Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*

And the one who becomes increasingly pure in this practical everyday sense, as a part of his sanctification, will, in some way, see God.

The heart is the centre of our personality and when used in Scripture it includes our mind, our will, and our emotions. It is the “real me”, the inner man with my many functions and the source of all my problems (Matthew 15 v18, 19) – and it is the “real me” which God wants to be pure. God wants us to be like His dear Son in our everyday life, thoughts and actions. And only God the Holy Spirit can do this in our hearts and lives as a gradual process (2 Corinthians 3 v18).

This beatitude is the second one to come after the “watershed beatitude” of verse 6. Think of that fourth beatitude as the peak of the mountain – the reception of God’s righteousness. The first three led up hill to it, and the next three – mercy, purity and peacemaking – flow from it and are the result of it.

What does it mean to see God?

- This promise has a present fulfilment. As we become more pure and more like Jesus Christ we will enjoy closer fellowship with Him and “see” Him as He is revealed in Scripture more clearly with our spiritual eyes of faith (Hebrews 2 v9).
- This promise has a future fulfilment. We will not with our eyes see God, the Father, Who is Spirit and invisible (John 1 v18; 1 Timothy 1 v17). But we will see God the Son Who is the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1 v15). That is the “beatific vision” to which we look forward. And we will enjoy full and complete fellowship with the Godhead.

Day 2

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5 v9).

The Bible makes it clear that our God is a God of peace (Philippians 4 v9; 1 Thessalonians 5 v23), the Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9 v6) and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of peace (Galatians 5 v22).

Peace is one of God’s main attributes and peacemaking is one of His main activities. Jesus Christ has made peace for us through His death on the Cross (Ephesians 2 v15) so that we could be reconciled to God (Ephesians 2 v16; 2 Corinthians 5 v18-21). When we trust Jesus Christ as our Saviour we have peace with God (Romans 5 v1) and God wants us, as believers, to have and enjoy the peace of God (Philippians 4 v7). God is a God of peace and if we, His children, are going to be like Him and have the family likeness we will also be peacemakers. God tells us in the Bible that we are to follow – or pursue – peace. That is to be our goal.

“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14 v19).

“Pursue peace with all people” (Hebrews 12 v14a).

If we do this we will be, as our beatitude says, blessed or happy and be called the children of God. And people will see God’s likeness in us.

How can we make peace?

There are three steps for every peacemaker to follow:

- Firstly, we need to be at peace ourselves before we can make peace:
 - ✓ We need to be at peace with God (Romans 5 v1) – and this comes, once and for all, when we trust Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

- ✓ We need to experience the peace of God (Philippians 4 v7) which comes primarily through genuine prayer (Philippians 4 v6).
- ✓ We need to allow that peace of God to rule or referee in our hearts (Colossians 3 v15) helping us to make the right decisions.
- Then, secondly, we should evangelize the lost and lead them to Christ so that they will have peace with God. In this way we will be making peace.
- Then, thirdly, we need to make it our aim and goal to encourage and make peace among the children of God and in the fellowship of the family of God. Division, bitterness and strife often appear among Christians – in the home, in the church and between individual Christians. We are to seek to bring reconciliation and to call others to peace.

At the same time we must be sure that we, ourselves, are not breaking peace with our brothers and sisters and that we are following our Lord's instructions (Matthew 5 v21-26 and Matthew 18 v15-17).

And as we make peace in all of these three ways the result is we will be peacemakers like our Father in heaven and be seen to be the children of God. My question must be – “Am I a peacemaker or a peace breaker?”

Day 3

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5 v10).

This is the eighth beatitude and verse 11, expands, explains, and applies it, especially to the disciples of the Lord Jesus, and to us as Christian workers and preachers. The eighth beatitude is somewhat different from the previous seven. They described the character of believers; but this one deals with what is likely to happen to believers as a result of those qualities in his life. If people live in accord with the first seven beatitudes they will often receive from the world – not applause, appreciation and thanks – but persecution, even when making peace, as in the previous beatitude. And unfortunately this persecution also comes, often, from professing Christians.

The persecution spoken about is persecution for righteousness’ sake. Some Christians are persecuted for their own sake, because they are objectionable, or offensive, or difficult, or demanding, or foolish. This beatitude does not apply to them. Peter must have had this beatitude in his mind when he wrote, *“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you but let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters”* (1 Peter 4 v14, 15).

Some are persecuted for doing wrong, or doing right in the wrong way – and deserve it. But this beatitude is for those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake – or, basically, because we are like Jesus Christ. He was persecuted and so shall we be if we are like Him (John 15 v20).

What is persecution?

Persecution for some has meant physical suffering and even death. For most of us in today's world it is more likely to mean criticism, ridicule, scorn or social ostracism. Or it might mean the loss of a job or lack of promotion.

Does this mean that if we are not persecuted in any way we are not living godly lives? Not necessarily. But the possibility must always be there.

Why are we persecuted?

It is because we are different. We think differently and live differently; we have different standards, different desires, different motives and different hopes. The world suspects people who are different – especially if they are in any way convicted by these differences. It makes them uneasy and uncomfortable, and will lead them to criticize those responsible, and try to make their life a misery. But this beatitude tells us that the believers who are persecuted for these reasons are blessed or happy. Why? Because the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. The first beatitude tells us that the key to this kingdom is poverty of spirit. Persecution, in this beatitude, is the badge of this kingdom. Persecution encourages us to know that we are in the kingdom of heaven and it helps us to look forward to that day when we will be in heaven forever. Persecution is in a sense a compliment because it shows us that the world takes us seriously and wants to silence us – and this gives us happiness and blessing.

Day 4

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5 v11, 12).

This verse seems to be an enlargement, expansion and explanation of the beatitude contained in verse 10 – rather than a separate beatitude. Like the previous beatitude it deals with persecution and the blessing which results from it. But it would seem to be more specifically directed towards the disciples of Jesus Christ and those engaged in Christian work. This would explain the reference to prophets in verse 12 and also the direct use for the first time of the word “you” in verse 11.

This type of persecution is described in verse 11 by the words “revile” and “say all manner of evil against you.” This is open scorn and criticism of these people and what they are saying – and it is similar to that faced by the Old Testament prophets. Those who face such persecution follow therefore in a godly line of those who were also reviled and criticized – Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, John the Baptist – and many more. Who are the revilers? Firstly, the people of the world – but that is to be expected; but, secondly, it could include religious people and religious leaders who are jealous of those speaking in this way and who do all they can to discredit them.

However, it is important to note and underline the word “falsely”. This promise of blessing and happiness is only for those who are not guilty of what is being said about them (as we saw in the previous verse); and we also need to see and understand that this promise is only for those who act and minister – “for My sake”.

What should be our reaction when we are subjected to criticism, scorn and persecution of this kind?

- We should not retaliate and try to hit back.
- We should not sulk like a child.
- We should not just dig in our heels stoically and decide to endure it.
- We should according to verse 12 “rejoice and be exceeding glad.”

How can we possibly rejoice in such a situation? Because we look forward to our reward – “*great is your reward in Heaven.*” We appreciate the glorious destiny which awaits us – and the “Well done” we will receive – and we rejoice.

This is exactly what the apostles did in Acts 5 v41 when, having been beaten because of their evangelism, they “*rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer shame for His name.*” We, like them and like Moses in Hebrews 11 v26, need to have “*respect unto the recompense of the reward*” and as we keep our eyes on eternity and eternal values we will rejoice.

And the result of this attitude in the life of a believer is, once again, blessedness and happiness.

Day 5

*“Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. **Blessed** are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” (John 20 v29).*

We have been looking at and examining the eight beatitudes given to us by the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, but did you know that He gave several other beatitudes? We will look at three of them during the remainder of this week.

First of all we need to remind ourselves what a beatitude is. It is a promise of blessing and happiness to those people who fulfil certain conditions. In the Sermon on the Mount these conditions were poverty of spirit, conviction of sin, meekness, a desire for righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, peacemaking and identification with Jesus Christ in persecution.

The beatitude in John 20 v29 takes us right back to the beginning of our Christian lives and reminds us of what happened when we trusted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

There is blessing and happiness in believing.

The Lord Jesus tells us that those who have not seen Him and are not eye witnesses of what He has done but who believe Him and believe on Him will be blessed.

So those who have trusted Him as Saviour receive His special blessing and the promise of happiness. Many of these blessings which are ours by faith are outlined in John's Gospel:

- We became children of God – by faith (John 1 v12).
- We received eternal life – by faith (John 3 v16).
- We were delivered from judgment – by faith (John 5 v24).
- We received the promise of satisfaction – by faith (John 6 v35).
- We received the assurance of our resurrection – by faith (John 11 v25).
- We received the promise that we will be a blessing to others – by faith (John 7 v38).
- We received the promise that we would not be in darkness but would be able to walk in the light – by faith (John 8 v12b).
- We received the assurance that we will see the glory of God – by faith (John 11 v40).
- We received the assurance of a fruitful and effective life (John 14 v12).
- We know that the Lord Jesus is praying for those who believe (John 17 v20).

And all these blessings according to John 20 v29 are for those like you and me who haven't seen but who have believed.

Paul says the same in Romans 4 v7 and 8: *"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; **blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.**"*

The sinner who believes is blessed in all these ways.

And the saint who lives and works with continual faith in His Saviour is blessed by God and supremely happy.

Day 6

*"But He said, 'More than that, **blessed** are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11 v28).*

God blesses and gives true happiness to those who put their faith and trust in Him. We saw this yesterday.

Believing brings happiness

A further benediction or beatitude is pronounced by the Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 11.

While the Lord Jesus was speaking to a group of people in this chapter He was interrupted by a woman who cried out that His mother must be a very happy and blessed person (Luke 11 v27). But the response of the Lord Jesus is interesting. He said, as our verse for today tells us, that His blessing, and the happiness which goes with it, is rather for those who fulfil two conditions:

- They hear the Word of God.
- They keep it or obey it (NIV).

Obedience brings happiness

Blessed or happy is the man, woman, boy or girl who obeys the Word of God. James echoes this beatitude in his epistle when he writes:

*"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be **blessed** in what he does" (James 1 v25).*

The writer of the first Psalm also pronounced and explained the blessing of God on the man who reads God's Word (Psalm 1 v2) and who obeys it and lives in accordance with it:

*"**Blessed** is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" (Psalm 1 v1).*

When a believer is obedient God blesses him and he is happy. But there is another side to this truth. When a believer is obedient God is happy. The Bible tells us that our obedience brings delight to the Lord.

"Then Samuel said: 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams'" (1 Samuel 15 v22).

One of our best known hymns expresses this perfectly:

*"When we walk with the Lord In the light of His Word
What a blessing He sheds on our way
When we do His good will He abides with us still
And with those who will trust and obey
Trust and obey for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey"*

Day 7

"I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20 v35).

We have already seen two "extra" beatitudes which were recorded in the Bible in addition to those in Matthew 5 v1-12.

➤ **Believing brings happiness (John 20 v29).**

➤ **Obedying brings happiness (Luke 11 v28).**

The Lord Jesus Himself gave a third "extra" beatitude. It is not recorded in the Gospels but Paul tells us in our verse for today that the Lord Jesus did pronounce this benediction or beatitude during His time here on earth:

➤ **Giving brings happiness**

Usually we associate happiness and blessedness with the things we receive, and there is no doubt that these generally do bring us happiness. But the Lord Jesus tells us that we get more blessing or more happiness by giving than we do by receiving. But this giving not only involves money. It also involves time, love, understanding, help and encouragement, and people need these more than money. As we give all of these God blesses us and gives us real joy and happiness.

This encouragement and command to be generous and liberal is found throughout the Bible:

"Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11 v1).

"The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Proverbs 11 v25).

"But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil" (Luke 6 v35).

"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9 v6).

In Paul's letter to the Philippians we read this wonderful promise in Chapter 4 v19:

"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4 v19).

But this promise was given to a church which had been generous in their financial support of the apostle (Philippians 4 v14-18). And they were certainly blessed through their giving.

We do not give, of course, just so we can receive. That should not be our motive. We give because God commands us to give – no matter what the result will be. But it is still encouraging and helpful to know that God has promised to bless and give happiness to the one who gives and to those who are generous and liberal with what they have.

Do we need to examine ourselves in the light of this beatitude? Are we generous and helpful to those in need – with our money, our time, our love, understanding and help?



Psalms 1:1,2

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. "

Week 5:

Theme – From Worry To Worship

Day 1

“O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, “Violence!” And You will not save” (Habakkuk 1 v2).

This week we will take as the basis of our daily meditations the book of the prophet Habakkuk and I have been greatly helped by Dr. Warren Wiersbe’s book on this subject entitled *“From Worry to Worship”*.

We will see that the prophet had a number of problems and how God led him through, step by step, to the solution of those problems. At the same time, we will also learn how we can find the solution to our own problems.

The prophet. Habakkuk was a prophet in Judah who lived about 600 BC. It was a time of injustice, immorality and violence. His nation was declining and under threat from a much stronger power.

His problem. His main problem and his main questions as you can see in our verse for today were, “Why isn’t God doing something?” “Why does God allow such things to happen to His people?”

His prayer. He knew that only God could solve his problem. So right at the beginning of his little book – in chapter 1 verse 2, our verse for today, he starts to talk to God, and that will eventually lead him to the solution he seeks.

The plan. The message of the three chapters in this book can be divided into three parts:

- Chapter 1. In this chapter the prophet does two things:
 - ✓ **He wonders.** He asks himself so many questions. Why is this happening? Why does God not intervene?
 - ✓ **He worries.** As a result he starts to worry and becomes very concerned and stressed about the whole situation.
- Chapter 2. In this chapter the prophet also does two things:
 - ✓ **He waits.** He cannot see the answer to his questions or the solutions to his problems. So he, wisely, waits to see what God will do.
 - ✓ **He watches.** He does not wait in a spirit of helplessness or hopelessness. He watches for the answers and he believes they will come.

- Chapter 3. In this chapter the prophet does two more things:
 - ✓ **He worships.** When the answer comes he prays and worships his God. His worries are turned into worship and joy.
 - ✓ **He witnesses** to who God is and what He has done.
- May God lead us from worry to worship and from fear to faith.

Day 2

“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?” (Habakkuk 1 v13).

In the first chapter of his little book Habakkuk outlines the problems which are causing him to worry. He had three main problems:

- He was worried about the sin of his own people (Chapter 1 verses 2-4). He saw their violence, their strife and all the destruction which was the result. He especially was concerned that there was so much injustice and that the wrong doers were not punished for what they did. But underlying this worry was the fact that God was allowing this to happen and not intervening in the situation.
- He was worried about the sin and evil of the Chaldeans (Chapter 1 v12-17) who were the enemies of the people of God. And yet God was raising them up to be His instrument of judgment upon the land of Israel.
- But his main worry and his main problem was with God (Chapter 1 v12-17):
 - ✓ He felt that God was indifferent and didn't care what happened to His people as we saw in our verse yesterday. “Why do you allow the sin among your people to continue?” He was concerned that he was crying out to God – and that there was no answer.
 - ✓ He felt that God was inactive. He was not doing anything. He would not hear, and He would not save (chapter 1 v2); He was tolerating evil and injustice in His own people and was doing nothing about it (chapter 1 v3).
 - ✓ He felt that God was inconsistent, and that what He was doing (or not doing) was not consistent with His character and attributes as we can see in our verse for today and the previous verse. “You are holy (verse 12), with pure eyes and not able to look on sin (verse 13) and yet You are going to use these sinful Chaldeans, who don't recognize or know You, to judge Your people. Your actions

contradict Your character. How can You, a holy God call the actions of these sinful men Your “marvelous work” (verse 5). I don’t understand how You can do such a thing.”

We should not, however, be too hard on Habakkuk. As we look at ourselves can we not remember times when we have been guilty of asking the same questions and experiencing the same worries. We worry about the sins of the world, and the sinful things which happen – and we wonder why God allows them. And in our hearts, like Habakkuk, we blame the things which happen on God Himself. Why does He allow this to happen to me? Why me and not someone else? It’s not fair and it’s not right.

We need to see the solution to these problems – and I trust we will as we find out how Habakkuk saw them.

Day 3

“I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected” (Habakkuk 2 v1).

Yesterday we saw the three problems faced by the prophet Habakkuk and his search for the solution to those problems – especially the problem he had with God! The first chapter of his little book outlines **his worries**.

When we come to the second chapter we see how God deals with these problems and worries, and how He helps and enables Habakkuk to react to them eventually in the right way.

In the first verse of the second chapter which is our verse for today we see the prophet’s three-fold reaction:

- **He waited.** He went up onto “*the tower*” and stood “*upon his watch*”. He detached himself as best he could from the problems.
- **He watched.** His focus now was on God alone. He was watching what “*He will say to me*”. His eyes were now open to God and not just his problems.
- **He listened.** He expected an answer – “*to see what He will say to me*” and he knew that this would include “reproof” or “rebuke”.

And then God spoke to him – gently but firmly – and the rest of the chapter contains what God said to him:

- In verses 2 and 3 God encouraged him to write down what He was going to say and what the results would be, so that others like ourselves would benefit from it.
- In verses 4 and 5 God spoke about the sinfulness of the Babylonians and specifically about their king (“he”) and He contrasted their sinfulness with the justification of those who live by faith (verse 4).

- In verses 6-19. God pronounced a series of five “woes” against the Babylonians. He wanted Habakkuk to know that they would be judged; and that while He would use them to chastise the Israelites, they would not escape punishment for their sin. He wanted Habakkuk to know that He is holy, that He is just – and that no sinner would escape His judgment – even though it may seem that they did.
These people had sinned grievously and they would sin – but they could not escape the judgment of a holy righteous God.
- In verse 20 God reminded Habakkuk lastly that He is sovereign (“*The Lord is in His holy temple*”) and commanded him and all the earth to be quiet and reverent before Him.

Habakkuk had gone up into his watch tower and had devoted himself to watching and waiting. He had said, “I’m going to stand upon my watch and I’m going to see what God is going to say to me, and how He’s going to answer me!” God answered him. God spoke – and that was enough for the prophet. It should be enough for us also. God always answers us when we wait and watch. Are you facing a problem just now? Wait and watch.

Day 4

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” (Romans 1 v17).

“But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith’” (Galatians 3 v11).

“Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10 v38).

In the second chapter of Habakkuk God speaks to the prophet in answer to the problems he has had. Yesterday we looked at what God said. Today I want to pick out three statements made by God in His response to Habakkuk – three verses with key statements which are very relevant to us today.

Habakkuk 2 v4b – *“The just shall live by his faith.”*

This statement is also found three times in the New Testament as our three verses for today remind us – (Romans 1 v17; Galatians 3 v11 and Hebrews 10 v38).

- Romans 1 v17 in its context especially emphasizes the word “JUST”. This word describes the only way that a sinner can be accepted by God. He must be just – or justified.

- Galatians 3 v11 in its context especially emphasizes the word “LIVE”. This word describes that the result of justification is a life in accordance with God’s law (Galatians 3 v12).
- Hebrews 10 v38 in its context and in the following chapter especially emphasizes the word “FAITH”. This word gives the condition by which we receive our justification, and by which we are enabled to live a life pleasing to God.

Habakkuk 2 v14: *“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”*

In the midst of darkness, sin, problems and worries the prophet, and we ourselves, are given an assurance that God is in control, and that there is a wonderful day coming when there will be no more sin, death, evil or separation – but instead the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of God, and be filled with His glory, which is the sum of all His attributes.

And we can look forward to that day.

Habakkuk 2 v20: *“But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”*

The prophet receives a final two-fold reminder which is even somewhat of a rebuke:

- Believe! God is in His holy temple. He is in control. He is sovereign. No matter what happens He is there in charge of the whole universe.
- Be quiet! One of the most difficult things for us to do is to be silent. We should not complain, worry or fret. Because He is in control we can be at peace. Isaiah wrote something similar in Isaiah 30 v15: *“In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”*

The key word and command for Habakkuk and us is – TO TRUST GOD.

Day 5

“O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy” (Habakkuk 3 v2).

The third chapter of Habakkuk’s little book is the prayer which he prayed in response to what God had said to him. This prayer consists of three parts:

- He prays for the work of God (verses 1 and 2).
He first of all expresses how he had been stirred by what God had said and how much he now stood in awe of Him. And then he prayed that God would do once again what He had done in the past – that He would revive

His work or, as translated in the NIV, that He would renew His deeds. He especially prayed that in the midst of His judgment and wrath He would show mercy.

- He ponders the wonders of God (verses 3 – 15).

He thinks back over God's great deeds and acts in the past and how they revealed God to man. These deeds showed Habakkuk (and us) what God is like and displayed His attributes.

These verses are poetic in their content and it is difficult for us to relate them specifically to historical events and deeds – although the prophet obviously did. But we can see shining through this catalogue of these deeds, the attributes of the One Who was responsible for them. The value of God's deeds is that they display His attributes and help us to know Him better:

- ✓ His holiness v3a
- ✓ His glory 3b
- ✓ His power v4 and 6a
- ✓ His eternity v6b
- ✓ His sovereignty v7-11
- ✓ His justice v12, 13 and 14
- ✓ His salvation v13

- He praises God and worships Him v16 – 19.

His immediate reaction to his coming into God's presence and talking to Him is one of fear. As he considers all that has happened, what God has said and how he has prayed he finds "his heart trembling, his lips quivering, his bones weakening and his legs wobbling!" But these are only temporary. Although he in this verse felt he was "falling apart", and in the next verse he said that everything else might "fall apart", he had now learned the three lessons which God wants him to learn:

- ✓ He had learned to REST in the Lord (verse 16b) – the One Who is sovereign.
- ✓ He had learned to REJOICE in the Lord (verse 18) – the One Who is the Saviour.
- ✓ He had learned to RELY on the Lord (verse 19) the One Who is our strength.

May we also learn these same lessons.

Day 6

"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation"
(Habakkuk 3 v17).

What a difference there is between the opening verses of this Bible book and the closing verses. Habakkuk's worries had led to his waiting and watchfulness and this has led to his worship.

His praise and worship are outlined in verses 16 to 19 of the third chapter and as we saw briefly yesterday they led him to do three things:

- First of all he had learned to REST in God – *"that I might rest in the day of trouble"* (verse 16). He had once again seen the sovereignty of God and had come to realize that, despite all the circumstances he had complained about in the first chapter, God was still in control. When he had a renewed vision of God he found that he could wait for God to accomplish His plan and that he could rest in the assurance that *"all things work together for good"* (Romans 8 v28).

We also must learn how to REST – in the face of whatever circumstances lie around us or before us. We need to learn to *"be still and know that (He is) God"* (Psalm 46 v10). He, our Good Shepherd *"makes us to lie down in green pastures"* (Psalm 23 v2). He does not want us to worry over and fight against the problem or the person involved. He certainly does not want us to complain or fight against Himself – as Habakkuk had been doing. He wants us to get our eyes fully on Him and allow Him to take away the stress, worry and hassle with which we are struggling so often.

- Secondly, he had learned to REJOICE. But he made clear the reason for his rejoicing and its source.

The source of his rejoicing was not in his fig trees, or his vines, or his olive trees or his fields or his animals. Even if they were not fruitful he wrote, *"I will rejoice in the Lord."* Why? Because He is *"the God of my salvation."*

What a lesson for us to learn! Our joy should not be in the things we have, or the good circumstances we face or the people we like. It needs to be anchored in the Lord so that when we don't have these other things, or when the circumstances are bad, or the people unpleasant we can still have joy. And the main reason for our joy is clearly expressed by Habakkuk. *"I will joy in the God of my salvation"* as our verse tells us.

Our main ground for joy is the fact that we are saved, that our sin is forgiven and that we have a sure home in Heaven.

Do you remember how our Lord responded to His disciples when they returned from their time of ministry (Luke 10 v17)? They spoke about how

successful their ministry had been and how excited they were about it. And the Lord Jesus acknowledged and appreciated their joy. But He added, *"But rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven"* (Luke 10 v20) Like Habakkuk and the disciples we should find our main joy in the fact that we are saved – and joy in the God of our salvation.

Day 7

"The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills. To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments" (Habakkuk 3 v19).

Habakkuk had learned to REST in the Lord (3 v16) and REJOICE in the Lord (3 v18). There was one further lesson he had learned. He learned to RELY on the Lord. In our verse for today Habakkuk makes three statements to show that he had learned this lesson:

- *"The Lord God is my strength"*

Not only is God his song and his salvation, He is also his strength. He is the One Who makes him strong.

"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40 v31).

The person who waits on the Lord and rests in Him is the one who is strong. Isaiah compares the one who has learned this lesson to an eagle. Habakkuk compares him to a deer!

- *"He will make my feet like hind's (deer's) feet"*

Not only does God give him strength, He also gives him guidance. God will help him to walk in the right way and go to the right places. God wants him to rejoice and be light hearted; but He also wants him to rely on Him and be sure footed. What an interesting picture this is – of a deer carefully and delicately choosing where to put its feet up there on the rocky mountains. Sometimes God turns us into eagles (as Isaiah writes) and we are given the grace and faith to soar above our problems and difficulties. But, at other times, He turns us into lovely deer which swiftly and surely and carefully pick their steps and are guided through the difficulty.

- *"He will make me to walk upon my high places"*

The emphasizes here is upon *"my high places"*. Just as the mountains and high places are closer physically to the heavens, so God wants us to be *"lifted up"* onto the high places, and to experience closeness and fellowship

with Him. Walking upon the high places means being close to Him, living in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2 v6) and worshipping Him.

And so the prophet has learned three great lessons which enable him to rely on God – for everything:

- ✓ For his strength
- ✓ For his guidance
- ✓ For his fellowship

Have we learned those lessons for ourselves? Have we learned to trust Him for all of these? Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote a little book about Habakkuk and he entitled it, “*From Fear to Faith*”. That was the journey the prophet took – and we need to take it also – and the key to it all is – FAITH!



Habakkuk 3:19

*"The Lord God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills."*

Week 6:

Theme –God's Provision For Man's Problems

Day 1

"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20 v19).

Do you have any problems in your life and ministry?

Could you identify with any of the following problems?

- Desertion. "I feel so lonely. I am on my own, I have no one to help me."
- Depression. "I have lost my joy. I am so easily upset."
- Discouragement. "I can see few results in my ministry. I feel like giving up."
- Distress. "I am afraid of what will happen in the future. I have no peace."

The disciples had been with the Lord Jesus for over three years. They had lived together, fellowshiped together and worked together. And then came the awful events of Calvary. The Lord Jesus had died. He was no longer with them. They had heard rumors that He had risen from the dead – but He still wasn't with them. They felt deserted; they felt let down; they were on their own; and their Lord and Master was gone.

What is the answer to a feeling of DESERTION, and an experience of LONELINESS?

We read in our verse for today that "*Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'.*"

If you and I have this problem of loneliness or desertion we need to have:

A Sense of His Presence

Their Lord came to them, they saw Him and knew that He was with them, and the result was – PEACE. When we realize that He is with us, He takes away the feeling of loneliness and gives us real peace.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were puzzled, and missing their Lord and Master very much. And we read in Luke 24 v15 that *"Jesus Himself drew near and went with them"*, and He opened their eyes (verse 31) so that they knew Him. They now knew that He was ALIVE; that He was ALONGSIDE them, and that He was ALWAYS THE SAME.

And then just before He returned to Heaven the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: *"....Io, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28 v20).

That is His promise to you and me today. He is with us in every situation – and He wants to give us A SENSE OF HIS PRESENCE. And when we know and are sure He is with us we will not feel deserted or lonely.

"You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16 v11a).

Day 2

"When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20 v20).

When we are lonely and feeling deserted the Lord Jesus wants to give us a SENSE OF HIS PRESENCE. This was what happened to the disciples when they were gathered together. They had "lost" their Master and Lord. But He appeared to them, stood in their midst and said *"Peace be with you"* (John 20 v19). His presence brought them peace and it still does to you and me.

But the disciples also felt deeply depressed. They were sad in their hearts. They were feeling very sorry for themselves. And they were very fearful in their hearts because of what they felt the Jews were going to do to them (John 20 v19). And this fear led them further into DEPRESSION.

What did the Lord Jesus do after He appeared to them and after He said *"Peace"*. We read in our verse that He showed them His hands and His side. He gave them:

A Sight of His Passion

Why did He do this?

- He did it, firstly, to identify Himself – so that they could be sure that it was their Lord and Master – the One Who had been crucified.
- He did it, also, to show that He was not a Spirit – that He had a real body and that He had truly risen from the dead. The first reaction of the disciples was that, *"they had seen a spirit"* (Luke 24 v37) and they were afraid. But seeing His hands and side assured them it was truly their Lord.

- But surely His main reason was to show them and remind them of what He had done for them (and for us) by dying on the Cross for all their sin. Seeing His wounds reminded them of His great sacrifice and, at the same time, showed how minimal their sufferings were in relation to His.

When we feel depressed or sad we should go to the Word of God and see again what He has done for us, to have a fresh SIGHT OF HIS PASSION and as we do that what will be the result? What happened to the disciples when they saw their Lord's pierced hands and side? Our verse tells us they were glad. The result was JOY and as we see all He has done for us, and meditate upon it the result for us will also be JOY – and our depression will be taken away.

The writer to the Hebrews brings out this same truth in Hebrews 12 v3. We should “*consider Him*” and His suffering – and, if we do, we will not be “*wearied and faint in our minds.*”

When we feel depressed or sad we should obey these two biblical commands:

- “*Behold the Lamb*” of God Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1 v29). See Him on the cross.
- “*Behold the Lion*” of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5 v5). See Him on the throne.

And we will have joy.

Day 3

“So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’” (John 20 v21).

A sense of the presence of Jesus Christ brings peace; and a sight of the passion of Jesus Christ brings joy. The disciples experienced both of these emotions when the risen Lord Jesus came and stood in their midst. And so will we!

Their desertion and depression had been dealt with. But they had a third problem and it is one which you and I might have. The Lord Jesus had called them into His service and had commissioned them to bring His message, His salvation and His healing to the needy masses of people (Matthew 10). They were to become fishers of men (Mark 1 v17). And here they were locked up in a room, afraid of the Jews and certainly not looking like a group of men who were going to turn the world upside down. And so their third problem was DISCOURAGEMENT. They felt so helpless and unable to do the work they had been called to do. They needed a fresh commission and a new impulse to get going once again.

A Share in His Programme

Perhaps we are in the same position. Our ministry is not going well. We are discouraged, helpless and weary. We need a fresh start and I believe that the Lord Jesus wants to give us a new commission as He did to the disciples. He wants to show us where we fit into His programme to evangelize the world.

He said to them in the words of our verse for today, *"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you"*. This is an amazing commission He gave to them. He not only said that He was sending them out in His service; but He compared this sending to the way His Father had sent Him. He had already made the same statement in His great High Priestly prayer in John 17 v18:

"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

- He had been sent into the world; they were being sent into the world.
- He had a message for the world (John 17 v8); they had a message for the world (Mark 16 v15).
- He had an object or goal for the world – to save sinners through His death (Luke 19 v10; 1 Timothy 1 v15). They had an object or purpose for the world – to save sinners through their message (John 17 v20; Luke 24 v47).
- He had an overall purpose when He came – to glorify His Father (John 17 v4). Their purpose was also to bring glory to God (1 Peter 4 v11).

What an amazing comparison – and it applies to us also.

What a wonderful recommissioning service – and it could be one for us also. They had had a **SENSE OF HIS PRESENCE**, which brought peace instead of loneliness and desertion, and a **SIGHT OF HIS PASSION**, which brought joy instead of depression; and now they had a **SHARE IN HIS PROGRAMME** for a lost world – and this brought purpose instead of discouragement.

Peace – joy – purpose. Don't we need these also? He will give them today if we ask Him.

Day 4

"And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20 v22).

Where could they get the power and strength to do this work? They must have been dismayed at what lay ahead of them and experienced real **DISTRESS**.

The Sufficiency of His Power

Our verse for today tells us that immediately after the Lord Jesus had recommissioned them for His service in verse 21, He gave them the power to

accomplish and fulfil that service. He always does that. When He calls us to do something, He provides us with all we need to obey and fulfil that call.

And so He “*breathed on them*” and He said to them “*Receive the Holy Spirit.*” They could not serve Him in their own strength. They needed supernatural help to do this – and that help would come from the Holy Spirit.

During the three years they had been together with the Lord Jesus He had often spoken about the Holy Spirit and how He would come to live in them and help them in their lives and ministries (Luke 11 v13; John 7 v38, 39; John 14 v16, 17, 26; John 16 v13-15). And soon after the events of John 20 He would tell them to wait in Jerusalem to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and the power He would give them (Luke 24 v49; Acts 1 v5).

But the great event of Pentecost and the gift and baptism of the Holy Spirit which would occur at that time still lay almost 50 days ahead – and so in the meantime the Lord Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit to help them, guide them and use them until that great day came.

They needed the Holy Spirit to have the knowledge and understanding they needed to be able to minister to others during those days – and to enable them to say to those who trusted Jesus Christ that their sins were forgiven (John 20 v23). And they needed the Holy Spirit to give them power in their lives and in their ministries. Now they saw and received THE SUFFICIENCY OF HIS POWER. They did not need to be dismayed and distressed at the task which lay ahead of them. The Holy Spirit gave them the strength they needed.

PROBLEM	SOLUTION	RESULT
Deserted	A sense of His Presence	Peace
Depressed	A sight of His Passion	Joy
Discouraged	A share in His Programme	Purpose
Distressed	The sufficiency of His Power	Strength

Can you apply these solutions and results to your problems? The disciples encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ changed them and will also change you and me.

Day 5

“For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. But you would not’” (Isaiah 30 v15).

There are three key words in today's verse which will help us with our problems:

Quietness

When you and I are quiet we will be strong. The world says, "In noise and action you will be strong", but God says, "The quiet man is the strong man."

Quietness towards God

God wants us to *"be still and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46 v10).

You and I need to take time to be quiet before God and worship Him in the quietness of meditation, trust and worship. We must never allow our work and activity to leave no time for this quietness before Him.

"But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Habakkuk 2 v20).

Quietness towards circumstances

The world complains about circumstances. You and I should not complain but instead we should commit whatever circumstances we face to God in prayer according to Philippians 4 v6 and 7. If we do, there will be two results in our lives. Firstly, we will have peace (Philippians 4 v7) instead of unrest; and, secondly, we will have contentment instead of complaints (Philippians 4 v11).

Quietness towards opposition

The world fights back. We should not! Our old nature wants to respond angrily to those who criticize us, oppose us and fight against us. But that is not God's way. He wants us to be quiet.

The Lord Jesus has given us in 1 Peter 2 verses 20-23 a good example which He wants us to follow. In verse 23 we read that He was reviled and that He suffered at the hands of sinful men. In verse 22 we read that He had done nothing to merit this reviling and suffering. He was innocent. He was sinless. In verse 23 we read how He reacted to His enemies:

- He was quiet. He did not revile or threaten.
- He committed Himself and the situation to His Heavenly Father.

In verse 21 we read that what He did was an example for us to follow. We should be quiet before our critics and enemies and commit the situation to our Heavenly Father for Him to deal with.

God wants us to make it our ambition to be quiet (1 Thessalonians 4 v11) and to have the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3 v4). Then we will be strong.

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah" (Psalm 46 v10 and 11).

Day 6

"In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30 v15).

God wants us to be quiet – towards Himself, towards all circumstances and towards opposition. But He also wants us to be confident. Quietness is primarily horizontal in our relationship to circumstances, people, problems, and responsibilities. But confidence is vertical. It is directed towards God. God wants us to put our complete trust and confidence in Him – in every situation. There are two dangers to avoid:

- We must not put our trust and confidence in ourselves. Solomon writes: *"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool"* (Proverbs 28 v26). We are not able to do our work or handle our problems in our own strength or with our own hands. Moses said, *"How can I?"* (Exodus 3 v11) and God said, *"Trust Me"* (Exodus 3 v12). Jeremiah said, *"How can I?"* (Jeremiah 1 v6) and God said, *"Trust Me"* (Jeremiah 1 v8). We need to put our trust and confidence in God – and not ourselves.
- We must not put our trust and confidence in others. The Psalmist writes, *"Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help"* (Psalm 146 v3) and again in Psalm 118 v8 and 9 *"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man."* It is good to have friends, to have helpers and to have co-workers – but they can let us down. David makes this principle very clear: *"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God"* (Psalm 20 v7).

Like David we need to learn to put our trust in God – and not in others.

We need to trust Him for everything:

- ✓ For salvation first of all. We cannot save ourselves – nor can anyone else save us. Only He can (Acts 16 v31).
- ✓ For strength in every situation. Like Paul we can say, *"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4 v13).
- ✓ For supplies. When He asks us to do something He promises to supply us with all we need (Philippians 4 v19).
- ✓ For safety when danger is imminent. The words of the psalmist in Psalm 121 still apply to each of God's children.

How can we have more trust and confidence in God – in all these situations?

- We need to understand and see Him as He really is:
 - ✓ He is absolutely sovereign and in control of all circumstances.
 - ✓ He is completely wise. He knows exactly what He is doing.

- ✓ He is our loving Heavenly Father Who cares for us.
- We need to understand His will for us, and be sure that we are in the centre of it. We can then be sure that He has committed Himself to us and to our ministry. He does not call us and then desert us.

Put your trust and confidence in God alone and He will never let you down.

Day 7

"In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30 v15).

God wants us to be strong and He has provided the means for us to be so.

Let us now go back to the passage in Isaiah from which this verse is taken and understand the context and the circumstances in which this command was given.

The children of Israel wanted to be saved from the Assyrian armies. They had a real problem and in light of it they felt weak and helpless. What should they do?

We read, first of all, of something they did not do. They took counsel but not from God (Isaiah 30 v1-2). They did not consult God concerning their problem, and God called them as a result, rebellious or obstinate (Isaiah 30 v1).

Instead they went down to Egypt. They were looking for Pharaoh to be their strength, and they wanted to put their trust in Egypt – not in God (Isaiah 30 v2). Isaiah then proceeded to tell the Israelites that they were wasting their time. The Egyptians could not help them (Isaiah 30 v7). Their confidence was completely misplaced, because of their total lack of faith in God.

And Isaiah continued by condemning them for what they had done (Isaiah 3 v8-14) and the result would be like the cracking, bulging and collapse of the wall which would have protected them (Isaiah 30 v13, 14).

But, in the midst of this condemnation from the prophet, he extends to them the gracious words of Isaiah 30 v15. *"In returning and rest you will be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength"* (Isaiah 30 v15). If they would repent they would be saved; if they were quiet before God and put their confidence in God they would be strong. And God promised in verse 18 to be gracious and merciful to them if they would wait for Him.

Unfortunately they said "no". They would not do what God wanted them to do (verse 15b). They preferred to put their trust in horses (Isaiah 30 v16) and chariots (Isaiah 31 v1). And the prophet pronounced a "woe" on them for doing this and not looking unto the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 31 v1).

But you and I need to be sure that we don't do what they did. Paul tells us that these things are examples for us and written to warn us (1 Corinthians 10 v11). We must not put our confidence in ourselves, or in others (no matter how many horses and chariots they have) – but put it completely in God.

And the more confidence we have in God the more quiet we will be to circumstances and problems. The less we try to force things, manipulate people and conduct campaigns, the more patient we will be and the more able we will be to rest and be quiet.

Earlier in his book Isaiah had already written:

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength." (Isaiah 26 v3 and 4).

As we trust Him and are quiet before Him and before our circumstances we will be strong – physically, emotionally, spiritually – and everlastingly.



Isaiah 26 :3

*"You will keep him in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You."*

Week 7:

Theme – Ezra, Man Of God

Day 1

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3 v16).

This week we will study the life and ministry of one of the most interesting characters in the Bible – a man of God who played a major part in the history of God’s people.

The background

To fill in the background to Ezra’s life and ministry we need to understand a number of basic facts and truths about God and His special Presence.

God wants a special place here on earth where He will dwell and manifest His special presence:

- In the book of Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus there was no such fixed place. The patriarchs built altars and worshipped God at them.
- God then gave His people detailed directions to build a tent or tabernacle (Exodus 25 v8 onwards), where God revealed His presence and where He was worshipped by the Israelites. Because the Israelites moved continually the tabernacle had to be “portable”.
- After they had settled in the Promised Land they still worshipped God in the tabernacle, which was now in a permanent location. King David wanted to build a more permanent building but God told him he could not build it (1 Chronicles 28 v3), but that his son Solomon would do so (1 Chronicles 28 v6). David collected the building material and Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem in 967 BC which took seven years to build. It was a magnificent building and God revealed His Presence there – in the most holy place.
- The temple lasted almost 400 years but was destroyed in 610 BC by the Babylonians and the people were taken into captivity (2 Chronicles 36).
- The second temple was built by Zerubbabel and his co-workers fifty years later when they returned from captivity to Jerusalem in 537 BC.
- Herod enlarged and rebuilt this temple from 19 BC onwards mainly to reconcile the Jews, but this magnificent structure was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

- When the Lord Jesus was here on this earth He was the temple in whom God dwelt – in a very special way (John 2 v19).
- God's temple and dwelling place today is in the hearts and lives of believers as our verse for today reminds us (1 Corinthians 3 v16, 17; 6 v19; 2 Corinthians 6 v14-18). What a privilege! There is no special building where God manifests His Presence as He did in the temple. He manifests His presence in each of us personally and when we meet with other believers.

Day 2

“This Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him” (Ezra 7 v6).

The second temple was constructed by Zerubbabel.

The tribes of Judah and Benjamin had been taken into captivity in Babylon in 610 BC. The return to Jerusalem and the Promised Land started in 537 BC. This, along with the building of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, took place in three stages, each under the leadership of one key man.

- Zerubbabel and those with him returned in 537 BC to REBUILD the temple. This is recorded in Ezra chapters 1-6. This building took twenty years. Zerubbabel was primarily involved with THE WORK.
- After an interval of fifty years (during which the events recorded in the book of Esther took place) Ezra returned to Jerusalem in 457 BC to REFORM the whole system and way of life at Jerusalem. His ministry extended over 25 years and overlaps with that of Nehemiah. Ezra was primarily involved with THE WORD.
- Nehemiah and his group returned to Jerusalem in 444 BC to REPAIR and REBUILD the walls.

Nehemiah was primarily involved with THE WALLS.

All three men played their part in God's plan for His people and His city of Jerusalem. But we will concentrate on Ezra – the man and his ministry – as it is recorded in the book of Ezra, of which he was the author.

This book was written after the return of the Israelites to their land. It is one of the three historical books written around that time – Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah. The first group of exiles to return to Jerusalem was led by Zerubbabel and they rebuilt the temple, as recorded in the first six chapters of the book of Ezra. When we come to the beginning of chapter 7 fifty years have passed by and there has been a great and sad decline in the spiritual and moral condition of God's

people at Jerusalem. And so God sent Ezra to Jerusalem to help guide and reform the struggling colonists.

- Ezra was a priest and a direct descendant of Aaron (Ezra 7 v5).
- He was a “*ready scribe in the law of Moses*” (Ezra 7 v6). The NIV translates this description as “*a teacher well versed in the law of Moses.*”
- He was given permission by the king of Persia to return to Jerusalem (verse 6b) and the king gave him an official letter of permission, along with the promise of all the finance he would need (verses 11-26). He also encouraged others to go with Ezra (verse 13); and he gave Ezra full and complete authority to do in Jerusalem what he felt was best (verses 25, 26).

All of this was surely a real miracle and can only be attributed to the Hand of God upon Ezra (as our verse for today tells us).

Day 3

“So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished” (Ezra 9 v3).

And so Ezra and the 1700 who accompanied him set off on the long and dangerous journey to Jerusalem which was to take four months. But before he did so he showed his thoroughness by carefully checking for three days those who were planning to go with him (8 v15) and he discovered there were no representatives from the priestly tribe of Levi. He determined to correct this situation before he would leave – and after consultation with others the gap was filled – by the Hand of God (verse 18).

Chapter 8 records how God protected them from all possible dangers during that long journey – and attributes that protection, once again, to the Hand of God (verses 22 and 31). Ezra showed his faith and confidence in God by trusting God for protection and safety – instead of asking for soldiers to protect them (verse 22) – and he encouraged his people to pray and have the same confidence. Their first actions when they arrived were to offer burnt offerings to the Lord and then to deliver the letter from the king to the authorities in the land.

But, before long, Ezra began to see the moral and spiritual decline of the people in the land and to realize how serious it was.

The first evidence of this decline was the information that many of God’s people had married heathens and were worshipping their gods (chapter 9 v1 and 2), and what made it especially serious was the fact that the leaders of the people (including the priests) were doing this.

Such intermarriage had been expressly forbidden by God. He did not want His people to lose their distinct identity and He knew that such lack of separation would eventually lead to idolatry.

How did Ezra react? What did he do?

- He knew this was wrong – because he was well acquainted with the Word of God.
- He experienced great sorrow in his heart – and showed it by tearing his clothes and pulling out some of his hair as we read in today's verse.
- He prayed to his God (verses 6-15).
Most of his prayer consisted of confession of the sins which his people had committed; and he identified himself with his people in their sin. He had seen the greatness of their sin, he acknowledged it and humbly confessed it and threw himself and his people onto the mercy of God.

Is this not a picture or example of how we should react when we are aware of the sin of our people and also the sin of our children?

We know that what we see is wrong; we should experience sorrow in our hearts, and we should take the whole matter to God in prayer – identifying ourselves with them, confessing their sin and pleading for God's mercy for them.

Day 4

"Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, 'Yes! As you have said, so we must do'" (Ezra 10 v12).

But the matter did not finish with Ezra's prayer of confession. That was only the beginning. When we come to chapter 10 we find that there was a tremendous response from the people. A vast congregation of people had gathered around Ezra – men, women **and children**:

- They all wept bitterly (10 v1). They too were convicted of their sin and demonstrated that conviction.
- They, through one of their leaders openly confessed what they had done (verse 2).
- They made a covenant with God to correct what they had done (verse 3).

It is especially interesting to us as children's workers to see that children were included in this vast congregation. They were not excluded, separated or left at home. And we can surely conclude that they participated in the three activities we have just mentioned.

Church history tells us of many times when children were involved in revivals and spiritual awakenings.

This was a real spiritual revival and awakening, involving three key elements – conviction, confession and a covenant with their God.

Ezra then took action in several ways:

- He asked and challenged the leaders and the people to keep to their promise and commitment (verse 5).
- He continued to mourn what they had done (verse 6).
- He called all the people together (verse 7).
- He preached to them (verses 10-11). It was not a time to condemn them for their sin. God had been working in their hearts. It was a time to control them and guide them in their repentance and show them what they needed now to do to handle their own affairs and put away their sin.
- They all cried out in the words of today's verse and said they would obey completely.

It took three months before it was all finished (verse 17). This is an Old Testament example of a spiritual revival. The three main elements found in this revival are the elements found in every revival.

- Personal acknowledgement of sin – whatever that sin is; and seeing how serious that sin is in the sight of God.
- Personal confession of that sin to God. This was not some kind of general confession, but a specific confession naming the sin concerned.
- Personal dealing with that sin, promising with God's help not to do it again – and ruthlessly cutting it out.

Is it not possible that God would grant the same kind of revival today if we, His people, were willing to follow the same steps?

Day 5

“Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law” (Nehemiah 8 v3).

The years pass by. When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of that great city in 445 BC Ezra had been there for thirteen years. There is no record of his ministry in the Bible during those years but he must have continued in his role as spiritual leader and teacher of his people.

But he does reappear in the Bible in the book of Nehemiah chapter 8. Nehemiah was the civil governor of Jerusalem and its surroundings; but Ezra as a priest and teacher was the spiritual leader – and his ministry is vividly explained in

this chapter. Nehemiah's job was to repair the walls; Ezra's was to repair the people's morals. He wanted to HELP his people spiritually and it is interesting that the name Ezra means "Help".

The walls had been built (Nehemiah 6 v15). In chapter 7 leaders were appointed to supervise the city and be sure it was protected. A census was taken of the people and those who lived outside the city were encouraged to move in.

Chapter 7 is one of rejoicing. The struggles had turned to jubilation and the people began to gather around the Word of God. They were now turning more and more from work and war to worship.

And so we read that the people all gathered together in the city (Nehemiah 8 v1) and requested that Ezra, the Scribe and Teacher, should bring before them the book of the Law – God's Word. They were hungry for God's Word and they wanted help in hearing and understanding it – and who better to help them than their old teacher Ezra:

- **God's Word was read.** Ezra did what the people requested, as we can see in today's verse, and he brought the Word of God before them. He then in verse 4 started to read it. He did so from a place where everyone could see him (verse 4) and he read with a voice which was distinct and clear and which everyone could hear (verse 8).

We should imitate him in our ministry – by bringing the Word of God to the children by quoting it and encouraging the children to learn it.

- **God's Word was respected.** When the Word of God was opened everyone stood up (verse 5). Ezra prayed and asked for God to bless His Word and the people bowed down and worshipped God as they listened to it.

We need to show the same respect for God's Word, use it and teach it reverently and encourage the children to respect it.

- **God's Word was explained.** Ezra did not just read the Word of God. He and the others with him "gave the sense" (verse 8) both publicly and privately – man to man – and caused them to understand the reading.

Our responsibility is not just to tell stories and speak to the children – but to teach them and help them to understand God's Word.

Are there lessons we can learn from Ezra for our ministry?

Day 6

"Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength'" (Nehemiah 8 v10).

We saw yesterday how Ezra ministered to his people and how he taught them the Word of God:

- God's Word was read – clearly and distinctly.
- God's Word was respected – as shown by the worshipful attitude of the people
- God's Word was explained. Ezra and his thirteen co-workers carefully explained what it meant – so that the people understood it.

But there was another important and vital step which Ezra did not omit – and we should not omit it either:

- God's Word was applied by Ezra, and by the Holy Spirit, Who worked in the hearts of the people as they listened to God's Word – and there were good results:
 - ✓ In verse 6 the people worshipped the Lord. The reading and understanding of God's Word should always lead us to worship Him.
 - ✓ In verse 9 the people were convicted of their sin and repented as they listened – and wept.
 - ✓ From verse 13 onwards the people saw that there were commands in God's Word which they should obey. During the day's exposition on passages from Leviticus they became aware that their worship had been sadly lacking in obedience with regard to celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. They had been celebrating the feast, but they had either not known about, or had ignored, the inconvenience of camping outside in rickety shelters! Now they obeyed the command God had given, and they went out and erected little shelters all over the city as a reminder of the time when God came and rescued them from bondage and tyranny.
 - ✓ In verse 9 they had wept sorely but now in verses 10-12 the people were encouraged by Ezra and Nehemiah to wipe away their tears and be joyful. God wanted this Feast of Tabernacles to be an occasion for joy and merriment as they remembered the good news which God had shown to them. This was what He had commanded in Deuteronomy 16 v15. There is a time when weeping and sorrow are necessary; but there is also a time – many times – when God wants His children to be joyful. And not only that, these people are told in our verse for today that *"the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

And this could well be the message God wants you and me to hear today. In the midst of our work and our concerns He wants us to be joyful.

"Rejoice evermore" (1 Thessalonians 5 v16).

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him" (Romans 15 v13).

And that joy which comes from the Lord will enable us to be strong.

Day 7

"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7 v10).

The Bible teaches us over and over again that the success of a ministry depends upon the quality and character of the man involved in it. Let's look at Ezra!

➤ HIS RELATIONSHIP TO GOD AND HIS WORD

Our verse for today tells us four facts about the man Ezra:

- ✓ He had a prepared heart. His teaching ministry was based upon his heart relationship with God, his heart relationship with his people and their needs, and upon his heart relationship to the Word of God which was the basis of his ministry.
- ✓ He sought the law of the Lord. In Ezra's life the law of the Lord was central. So he read it, studied it and applied it to himself besides teaching it to others as he was well able to do (Ezra 7 v6).
- ✓ He was obedient to God's Word. What he had seen and learned he put into practice in his own life. This was the basis of his godly life.
- ✓ He taught the Word of God. He was now in a position to teach God's Word because he had applied it to his own life first of all.

➤ HIS OBEDIENCE TO GOD AND HIS CALL

Ezra had a settled life and ministry in Babylon. But God laid a burden on his heart to leave his comfortable life and travel many miles to Jerusalem to take on the responsibility of spiritual leadership there. He obeyed God and prepared himself and the company of people who were to go with him for this big and dangerous step.

➤ HIS FAITH IN GOD AND HIS POWER

He knew there would be great responsibility and dangers ahead of him but he trusted God to supply all his needs – and God did:

- ✓ He was **strengthened** personally by the Hand of God (Ezra 7 v28).
- ✓ His needs were **supplied** by the Hand of God (Ezra 7 v6-26).
- ✓ He was **sent** to the people he needed for the priesthood by the Hand of God (Ezra 8 v18).
- ✓ He was kept **safe** on his journey by the Hand of God (Ezra 8 v31).

We need to learn from this that when God calls us to do something He commits Himself to supply all we need for the ministry He has called us to.

➤ **HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS**

Ezra had been in Jerusalem for 13 years before Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls and become its governor. But Ezra continued to exercise his teaching ministry and to give spiritual leadership although he is not mentioned in the first seven chapters of Nehemiah. But we see both men working together harmoniously in chapter 8 – and especially verse 9. What a good example to follow!

➤ **HIS CONCERN FOR THE CHILDREN**

Ezra's purpose in his life and ministry was *“to seek from God a right way for us and for our little ones”* (Ezra 8 v21b).



Ezra 7:10

“Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

Week 8:

Theme – Paul's Farewell Message

Day 1

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly" (1 Peter 5 v2).

The meditations this week are based, like all the other meditations in this book, on messages I have preached down through the years. However, I only preached on our theme for this week on one occasion and that was when I met for the last time with the group of Polish children's workers whom I had trained and prepared for a full-time ministry to children.

Paul's farewell message was preached to the leaders of the church in Ephesus, and in our study today we will look, first of all, at the background to this message.

Paul's first visit to Ephesus took place during his second missionary journey and is recorded in Acts 18 v19. It was a short visit but he promised to return. He returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 18 v1) and stayed there and in the surrounding area for well over two years. And in this city God was pleased, through Paul, to establish a faithful church – one of the finest churches written about in the New Testament.

Ephesus was a large city with over 300,000 inhabitants. It was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia and a thriving trade center. It was also a religious center in which was the great temple to Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Paul then left Ephesus to return to Macedonia (Acts 20 v1); and six months later he left Macedonia to return to Jerusalem. On his way there he called the Ephesian elders to come and meet him in the port of Miletus, 50 kilometers distant from Ephesus, and it was there he delivered this farewell message. It was directed to the leaders of the church at Ephesus – but it was also meant for the church members to whom they would transmit it.

There are eight of Paul's messages recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. But this is the only one preached to believers. Here we see Paul the pastor and not Paul the evangelist.

The group gathered at Miletus to listen to Paul was described in three ways:

- They were elders (Presbyteroi) (verse 17). This word showed their seniority in the church and also their responsibility to give leadership to it.
- They were overseers (Episkopoi) (verse 28a) (NIV). This word underlined their responsibility to guide – and also to discipline where necessary.
- They were shepherds (Poimainoi) (verse 28b) (NIV). This word emphasized their vital ministry of feeding and tending to the needs of the church members. Peter refers to this responsibility in our verse for today.

Are you in a position of leadership – of any kind? Then Paul's message will be of special value to you.

Day 2

“Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews” (Acts 20 v19).

Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders can be easily divided into three parts:

- He reviews the past (verses 18-21).
- He testifies concerning the present (verses 22-27).
- He warns about the future (verses 28-38).

A review of the past

He commences his message by looking back at his two earlier visits to Ephesus, and he reminds them of the three cardinal features of those visits:

- He explains his MOTIVES when he was with them.
His only purpose, goal and motive was to “*serve the Lord*” (verse 19). He had no selfish motive. His only concern was that he should be obedient to his Lord and completely surrendered to His will.
Later in his message he returns to the subject of motive again and he points out two additional features of his ministry:
 - ✓ He had no interest in money. He “*coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel*” (verse 33).
 - ✓ He had no desire for an easy life. He used his own hands to meet his needs and those of his co-workers (verse 34). He probably supported himself by his tent-making.

By explaining his motive Paul was not seeking praise or applause of any kind. He wanted to be an example to the elders – and his desire was that they would have the same motive as he had, that they would also serve the Lord, and that they would avoid any longings for, or attempts to accumulate, money or have an easy life.

- He describes in our verse for today the MANNER of his ministry and his way of life in three ways:
 - ✓ His humility (verse 19). Pride is a great danger to those who are in positions of leadership and Paul always sought to avoid it. Also he trusted that the elders would be sure to avoid it.
 - ✓ His tears (verse 19). Paul was not an emotional person. But he was a compassionate person and he identified himself clearly with the people he ministered to – both in their joys and in their needs.
 - ✓ His testings (verse 19). His ministry was not an easy one. The NIV translates the latter part of this verse “*I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews.*” As always his ministry had been difficult.

What a model Paul was for these elders as they listened to him! And what a model and example he is for us also! And he exhorts us to imitate him – just as he has followed or imitated the Lord Jesus:

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11 v1).

Day 3

“Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20 v21).

As Paul reviewed the past, and his ministry to the Ephesians when he had been with them he outlined three important parts of that ministry:

- His motives – serving the Lord.
- His manner – humble, compassionate and brave in the face of difficulty.
- And then he reviewed the MESSAGE he had preached to them.
 - ✓ The two main **parts** of that message (in verse 21 – our verse for today):
 - Repentance toward God. He had challenged the people in Ephesus concerning their sin and their sinful practices and had explained that they needed to turn from their sin.
 - Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. He had explained that they should now turn to Jesus Christ and trust Him; and if they did that they would be saved.
 - ✓ The **places** that message was preached, “*I taught you publicly and from house to house*” (Acts 20 v20b).
He had preached it publicly to those who would listen; and privately from house to house.
 - ✓ The **people** who heard that message (verse 21). He did not restrict his friends to any one group of people – but he preached it to everybody – both Jews and Greeks.

- ✓ The **principles** he followed when preaching that message:
 - His preaching was comprehensive. He declared to them “*all the counsel of God*” (verse 27). His ministry was an example of “*evangelism in depth*”. He did not restrict himself to one or two “*simple*” truths. He “*kept back nothing that was profitable to them*” (verse 20).
 - At the same time he did not just make statements. He taught them (verse 20). He explained each truth so that they could understand.

It is obvious from what Paul said here and elsewhere that he preached a message which was balanced and yet involved no compromise. It was based on doctrine but was directed towards duties. It demonstrated the privileges which would be enjoyed by those who responded; and also outlined the responsibilities which went along with their privileges.

We need to ask ourselves as we minister to the children if we are preaching the same message to our children as Paul preached; and if we are using the same methods as he used:

- Is it a message of repentance and faith?
- Are we reaching children publicly and privately?
- Is our aim all children – or are we restricting ourselves to special groups?
- Is our message a comprehensive one and are we really teaching it?

These are searching questions which we need to answer.

Day 4

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20 v24).

Having looked back over his ministry Paul proceeds in verses 22-27 to give a personal testimony concerning himself now, in the present, and for the immediate future.

A testimony concerning the present

- First of all he describes his feelings, emotions and decisions concerning what he is doing now and in the near future.

- ✓ He is going to Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit has directed him to do so – he is “*compelled by the Spirit*” (NIV) (verse 22).
- ✓ He realizes that difficulties and hardships lie ahead of him (verse 23).
- ✓ He is determined never to quit or give up (verse 24)
- He then describes his ministry – by using six images or pictures – most of them in our verse for today (I got this outline from the writings of Dr. Warren Wiersbe):
 - ✓ He is like an accountant (verse 24) – “*neither count I my life dear to myself.*” He has examined the “assets and liabilities” and has decided to put Jesus Christ first.
 - ✓ He is like a runner (verse 24) – “*so that I might finish my course with joy.*” He wants to run his race well and finish it victoriously.
 - ✓ He is like a steward (verse 24) – “*the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus.*” His ministry of the Gospel had been given to him by the Lord – and he wanted to be a good steward of it.
 - ✓ He is like a witness (verse 26) – “*testifying the Gospel of the grace of God*” and he wanted to do this faithfully.
 - ✓ He is like a herald (verse 25) – “*preaching the kingdom of God*” . The word “preaching” here means to “proclaim and declare a message like a herald”, and this was what he was commissioned to do.
 - ✓ He is like a watchman (verse 26) – he was “*pure from the blood of all men*”. He had faithfully proclaimed the message he had been given like the watchmen in Ezekiel 33 v1-9, and if his listeners were lost it was their fault – not his.
- Paul uses the words “I know” three times in this testimony:
 - ✓ “*I know the hardships which lie ahead*” (verses 22 and 23).
 - ✓ “*I know that I will not see you again*” (verse 25).
 - ✓ “*I know that you are going to have problems*” (Acts 2 v29). We will see how he warned them about these problems during the rest of this week.

How wonderful it would be if we could give the same testimony concerning our ministry as Paul did! Are we good and faithful accountants, runners, stewards, witnesses, heralds and watchers?

Day 5

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20 v28).

Paul now proceeds to look forward into the future and especially to give them a clear and solemn warning concerning themselves, the church of which they were the leaders, and the dangers which faced them.

A warning concerning the future

In these verses (verses 28-38) Paul centres his message to the elders around three key words – sheep, shepherds and wolves.

- In verses 28 and 29 Paul refers to the believers in the church at Ephesus as *"the flock"* – the sheep – over which they the elders, are the leaders and overseers. Yes, they are sheep and like sheep they are often wayward and obstinate, and they tend to wander. And like sheep they need guidance, help, direction and food. They will often try the patience of those who are responsible for them. And this applies to those of us who are children's workers and ministering to the needs of the little sheep. Remember that before the Lord Jesus told Peter to *"Feed My sheep"* (John 21 v16, 17), He, first of all, commanded him to *"Feed My lambs"* (John 21 v15).
- Yes, they often try our patience. But we need to be reminded that these sheep, this flock, is part of *"the church of God"* (verse 28), that they have been *"purchased with His own blood"* (verse 28) and that the Holy Spirit has appointed us as their overseers (verse 28). In other words, they are the flock of God the Father purchased by the precious blood of God the Son and supervised by overseers appointed by God the Holy Spirit. If the Triune God is so committed to these sheep and lambs should we not also be?
- Verse 28 in the NIV reads, *"Be shepherds of the church of God."*
The shepherd has two responsibilities:
 - ✓ To feed his flock. Sheep need food and often they are not able to find it for themselves. So the shepherds' responsibility is to lead them to places where they can eat and then feed them.
 - ✓ To protect from wild animals like wolves – and we will speak about these wolves tomorrow.
 The shepherd needs to watch out for those who would distort the truth and devastate the flock.

And the Apostle Paul sets himself before these elders (and before us) in the earlier verses of this chapter (verses 18-27) as an example of what a shepherd should be and do – and we should follow his example.

We remind ourselves again of Paul's oft repeated exhortation to follow and imitate him:

"The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4 v9).

Day 6

"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20 v29).

As we examine in more detail Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders concerning the future, we need to apply that same warning to ourselves and to our ministry. The dangers which we will see and examine are as real today as they were in Ephesus, in Paul's day; and we as Christian workers and especially as children's evangelists need to heed his warnings:

- He warned them in our verse for today about the DANGERS AROUND THEM

The word "wolves" obviously refers to false teachers. The Lord Jesus had used this same image or picture in Matthew 7 v15 when He told His disciples to *"beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves."*

- He warned them about the DANGERS AMONG THEM

"Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20 v30).

It is even more serious and more dangerous when the danger comes from within our own ranks. And Paul describes two ways that people, or even leaders, inside a church or mission can cause danger, and harm:

- ✓ By *"speaking perverse things"*. The NIV translates these words *"distorting the truth"*. It is the thought of turning something in the opposite direction. They don't speak against the truth like the wolves; they just turn it around to mean something else; and because they are inside the Christian community they can cause more harm than those who attack from outside.
- ✓ By *"drawing away disciples after them"*. This people are hungry for power and position within the church, and they use their distortion of the truth to gather disciples and become the leaders of these disciples.

They are like Diotrephes in 3 John verse 9 who *"loved to have the pre-eminence among us"*.

- He warned them of the DANGERS WITHIN THEM (verses 28-35) And the emphasis in these verses is *"take heed to yourselves"* (Acts 20 v28). The main problems we experience and the greatest dangers we face are those which come from within our own hearts. Leaders need especially to be continually examining themselves and ensuring that there is nothing in their lives which will harm them or harm others. None of us is perfect; and none of us can be perfect. But we need to be, in the words of Robert Murray McCheyne *"as holy as it is possible for a saved sinner to be – this side of eternity."* We will see tomorrow the warnings Paul gave of dangers within themselves. If we fail to see these dangers and deal with them the flock will suffer.

Day 7

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20 v28).

"Keep watch over yourselves" (NIV) writes Paul in our verse for today and then he repeats this warning in verse 31, *"So be on your guard"* (NIV).

There are a number of possible dangers we can face from within ourselves and Paul outlines them to the Ephesus elders:

- Don't be careless (verse 31). He had warned them for 3 years about possible dangers and problems, and he had done so with tears of concern. We need to be alert to the dangers our leaders have warned us about.
- Don't be shallow (verse 32). God's Word gives grace and all that we need to build up His people, and inform them about all that is theirs. We need to be students of God's Word – not just skimming over the surface; but digging into it so that it can enable us to see what God wants us to see and be what God wants us to be.
- Don't be covetous (verse 33). Paul testified from his own experience that he had no desire for what other people had. And we must be the same. It is so easy to become envious of those unbelievers, or even believers, who have bigger homes, better cars and more income than we have. But if we do, we will not only break the tenth commandment, we will cause ourselves untold problems and harm.

➤ Don't be lazy (verse 34). Paul sets himself up again as an example to follow. He could have depended completely upon them and could have had an easy life. But he chose to work and meet his own needs and those of his co-workers. Every Christian worker needs to imitate Paul (1 Corinthians 4 v16; 11 v1) and this means that we need to work hard and not be lazy – whether we support ourselves – as Paul did, or whether we give our full-time to the ministry which God has given us, trusting Him for the financial support needed. In either case there is no place for laziness.

➤ Don't be selfish (verse 35). Paul emphasized the importance of giving as much as we can to support those who need it and he quoted a beatitude from the Lord Jesus which is not found anywhere else in the Bible, *"It is more blessed (or happy) to give than to receive."*

And as we who receive so much give to others we will be blessed and happy. And then Paul knelt down with the elders and prayed with them. How wonderful it would be to have heard, or to read, what he prayed! All the elders wept, embraced Paul because they knew they would not see him again. And Paul departed! A truly moving scene – and one which, as we look back over Paul's final address to them should also touch our hearts and lives.



Acts 20 :24

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.."

Week 9: Theme - Our Relationship With Other Believers

Day 1

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2 v42).

This week we want to study and understand how we should relate to other believers – and the key word for these relationships is **FELLOWSHIP**.

The life and responsibility of a Christian can be illustrated by a wheel with four spokes radiating from the hub to the circumference:

The hub in the centre represents ourselves and the circumference represents **GOD**.

- The spoke which goes up vertically is **PRAYER** – contact with God.
- The spoke which goes down vertically is **THE WORD** – the foundation of the Christian life.
- One of the horizontal spokes is **WITNESS** – our relationship with the unsaved.
- The other horizontal spoke is **FELLOWSHIP** – our relationship with other believers.

A somewhat similar picture describes the early church in our verse for today (Acts 2 verse 42):

- *“They continued steadfastly in (or devoted themselves to) the apostles’ doctrine”* – that is the teaching and understanding of the Word. This was their foundation – the spoke which goes down vertically.
- *“and fellowship”* – in their close relationship to each other. This is one of the horizontal spokes.
- *“in breaking of bread and in prayers”* – in their relationship to God. This is the spoke which goes up vertically.
- and the previous verse shows the result of their witness – the salvation of 3,000 souls. This is the other horizontal spoke.

Consequently, one of the main characteristics of the early apostolic church was fellowship – **KOINONIA**.

John emphasizes the need for, and the value of, the fellowship of believers in 1 John 1 v3. He refers to two kinds of fellowship which are closely linked together:

- “Our fellowship (KOINONIA) is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ”. That is a vertical fellowship and is one of the spokes.
- “That you also may have fellowship (KOINONIA) with us”. That is a horizontal fellowship and is a second spoke.

May you and I make it our goal to experience and enjoy both of these fellowships.

Day 2

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3 v28).

The key word in our relationship with other believers is FELLOWSHIP.

The basis of this fellowship is the unity of all believers

- The Bible teaches the unity and oneness of all believers, and that we are, as our verse tells us “*all one in Christ Jesus*”.
- ✓ The Bible gives a number of pictures which illustrate this unity:
 - Jesus Christ is the Head and believers the body (1 Corinthians 12 v27).
 - Jesus Christ is the Vine and believers the branches (John 15 v1-12).
 - Believers are the stones in the spiritual house or temple Jesus Christ is building (1 Peter 2 v4-10).

Each illustration shows that believers are united to Jesus Christ and also to each other.

- ✓ The Bible gives a number of clear statements which teach this unity:
 - “*Endeavouring to keep the **unity of the Spirit***” (Ephesians 4 v3).
 - “*Till we all come in the **unity of the faith***” (Ephesians 4 v13).
 - “*The multitude of them that believed were of **one heart and of one soul***” (Acts 4 v32).
 - “*That their hearts might be **knit together in love***” (Colossians 2 v2).
- We as believers are united with other believers – whether we like it or not. This is a spiritual unity. It is a present reality – despite any differences we might have. This unity has been created by the Holy Spirit. It is not made by man and cannot be destroyed by him.
- This unity needs to be understood, realised and put into practice as FELLOWSHIP in our relationships. Fellowship should be the natural result of unity.

This unity, and the fellowship which results from it, will have many obvious consequences. A number of these consequences are included in Romans 12 as a result of being members of the one body (Romans 12 v4-18):

- ✓ We will care for each other with brotherly love (Romans 12 v10a).

- ✓ We will honour each other and be ready to give the other the first place (Romans 12 v10b).
- ✓ We will pray for each other (Romans 12 v12b).
- ✓ We will rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12 v15).
- ✓ Above all else we will live peaceably with each other (Romans 12 v18).

You and I need to ask ourselves two questions. Do I really believe in the unity of all believers? Am I in fellowship with other believers?

Those who isolate themselves completely from other believers are denying the truth of the unity of believers in the body of Christ. Their isolation will come to an end when they enter Heaven!

Day 3

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4 v3).

One of the main passages dealing with the unity of believers is Ephesians 4 v1-16. This is the unity of all those who are truly saved, who have trusted the same Saviour, who have believed the message of the first three chapters of this epistle, and who share the same life. They are all agreed on fundamental doctrines even though they might differ on some relatively minor points.

Believers are exhorted in today's verse to KEEP or PROTECT this unity of the Spirit. It is there but it is possible for us to ignore it, or even reject it – and as a result we can break or lose our fellowship with other believers.

Paul goes on to outline in verses 4 to 6 seven foundations and evidences of this unity:

- **Onebody**
This word shows the organic character of unity of the Spirit. We **all** belong to the one universal Church.
- **One Spirit**
We are **all** indwelt by the same Holy Spirit.
- **One hope**
We **all** look forward to the same destiny. We will all be in Heaven together; and there will be no separate groups there.
- **One Lord**
The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord and Saviour of us **all**.
- **One faith**
This refers, surely, to justifying faith, the faith which is the means by which God has saved **each one** of us, without exception – because there is no other way of salvation.

➤ **One baptism**

This one baptism is the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12 v13) by which **all** believers without exception are baptized into the body of Christ. It is therefore closely connected to the words one Spirit, one Lord and one body.

➤ **One God and Father**

We are **all** children of the same Father and we are **all** therefore in one big family.

These seven factors are true of every believer and together they demonstrate a unity which has already been created and which needs to be kept and protected. It also needs to be demonstrated and developed. And so Paul in Ephesians chapter 3 tells us to “*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” and “*to forbear one another in love*” (Ephesians 4 v2b).

Day 4

“That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17 v21).

Another key passage which deals with the unity of all believers is the prayer of the Lord Jesus in John chapter 17.

The unity of all believers needs to be seen and understood in two ways:

- There is already a spiritual unity among all believers. We are all one. We have seen yesterday that this unity has been produced by the Holy Spirit. It is not a goal to be achieved; it is a fact which has already been accomplished.
- There needs to be a visual demonstration of this spiritual unity. This spiritual unity needs to be manifested and when it is unbelievers will be converted, God's people and their ministry will be blessed and God will be glorified. One of the illustrations used in the Bible to describe the people of God is that of a family. Every member is already part of God's family and therefore there is already a unity. But everyone needs to ensure that this unity is built up and displayed and that squabbles are avoided.

In John 17 the Lord Jesus deals with both of these matters:

- He prays first of all concerning the spiritual unity which believers already have. In verse eleven He prays “*that they may be one, as We are.*” This could be translated “*that they may be continually one*”. In other words, “They are already one and I pray that they will always be so.”

In today's Bible verse the Lord Jesus compares the unity of God's people to the unity between Him and His Father. And this confirms that He is thinking about and praying for a unity which already exists and which He desires will continue.

In verse 23 He gives the basis for this spiritual unity. God the Father dwells in God the Son; and God the Son dwells (through the Holy Spirit) in all believers. This is a oneness and unity which already exists.

- But the Lord Jesus, secondly, prays for this unity and oneness to be demonstrated – especially to the unsaved. Why? So that they will be saved.

Verse 21 ... *“that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”*

Verse 23 ... *“that the world may know that You have sent Me and You have loved them.”*

Consequently, the more you and I demonstrate the spiritual unity which already exists among us, the more impressed the unsaved will be with our message, and the more likely they are to listen to it and repent. And the opposite is also true.

But, even more importantly, the more we experience and show a spiritual unity and fellowship with other believers, the more we will please our Lord and Saviour – and be the answer to His prayer.

Day 5

“Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2 v2).

In the light of what we have learned this week about the unity of all believers, and the need for this unity to be demonstrated in our fellowship with other believers, there are several conclusions we could come to:

- We need to recognize the unity of all believers and realise that it actually exists in the sight of God.
- We need to guard and protect this unity, to demonstrate it to an unbelieving world, and do all we can to develop it. The application and demonstration of this unity is something we need to work at – just as Paul exhorted the Philippian believers in today's verse.
- We need to understand that there is a substantial body of doctrine with which we all agree. We all believe the fundamental truths of the Word of God.
- We need to recognize that unity and uniformity are not the same thing. We have unity, but we do not necessarily have uniformity. Consequently, we

need to recognize that there are differences among believers with regard to some doctrines such as the method of baptism, the details of prophecy, the spiritual gifts which are in existence today, and whether a believer can lose his salvation or not.

We all hold our own views on doctrines such as these, but we must not allow differences of viewpoint on such doctrines to cause a breakdown in fellowship with others. It is possible to agree to disagree – in the right spirit.

- We should fellowship with all those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and are born again – even if we don't belong to the same church or denomination, and even if there are some points with which we don't agree. And we should explore possible ways of demonstrating that unity and fellowship without compromising our own beliefs.
- We should avoid separation and isolation from other believers. The Bible commands us to be separate from unbelievers but not from believers.
- Above all, we should always have the right spirit with regard to other believers – even those with whom we don't agree. We need to be careful what we say to them or about them. The Bible exhorts us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4 v15) and we are exhorted to “*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4 v3).
- We need to be, as Paul reminds us in our Bible verse, united (and at one) in our thinking, our loving and our willingness to agree with each other.

Our attitude to fellow believers can be summarized in three words:

- In essential things – UNITY
- In non-essential things – LIBERTY
- In all things – CHARITY

Day 6

“That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1 v3).

On the basis of the unity which already exists among believers, and the fact that we are all “*one in Christ Jesus*”, God wants us to enjoy and build FELLOWSHIP with other believers. The Bible teaches us much about this fellowship.

The main Greek word in the New Testament for fellowship is KOINONIA. This word means “*sharing in common*”, and a number of Bible passages, using that word, show us what it means:

➤ It means spiritual fellowship

Koinonia means first of all an inward communion with other believers which transcends any denominational barriers. John writes in today's Bible verse that the primary purpose of what he is writing is "*that you may have fellowship (KOINONIA) with us.*" And the writer to the Hebrews encourages his readers "*not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together*" (Hebrews 10 v25). In our spiritual fellowship we can pray for each other, we can share the Word of God with each other, and we can exhort and encourage each other.

We all need this kind of spiritual fellowship:

- ✓ We can have it in a group with other believers. This could be either in our own church, or with believers from other churches.

One of the richest spiritual experiences in my early Christian life was travelling to work each morning with a group of believers in a compartment of a train. We were all from different backgrounds and denominations but as we studied the Word of God together and prayed together we had wonderful spiritual fellowship.

- ✓ We can have it with one other person.

We need to pray that God will give us a friend with whom we can have this spiritual fellowship, with whom we can get together from time to time to pray, encourage, help and, (if necessary), reprove. Such a friendship can be a great spiritual blessing (Proverbs 27 v17; Ecclesiastics 4 v9, 10).

➤ It means fellowship (partnership) in the Gospel.

This is a fellowship in service where we serve God together in fellowship with other believers. Paul expresses appreciation to the Philippian believers for their "*fellowship (KOINONIA) in the Gospel*" (Philippians 1 v5). This certainly included the financial support which they sent to him and which Paul refers to in Philippians 4 v14 and 15 where the word "communicate" is also KOINONIA. It seems that they were the only church to fellowship with Paul in this way and to assist him financially. This fellowship in the Gospel also involves prayers for each other. Paul certainly depended upon the prayers of others and referred in his letters to those who prayed for him personally and for his ministry (for example Romans 15 v30-31).

Day 7

"But do not forget to do good and to share (KOINONIA), for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13 v16).

Today's verse tells us that we should not forget to fellowship, and that God is pleased when we do. How can we experience fellowship with other believers?

- We have seen that we can have spiritual fellowship (1 John 1 v3).
- We have seen that we can have fellowship in the Gospel (Philippians 1 v5).
- But we can also have fellowship in service, team work and the use of spiritual gifts.

God wants us to WORK and use the gifts He has given us together with other believers to reach the unsaved and to edify the saved.

- ✓ The Lord Jesus sent out His disciples two by two (Mark 6 v7).
- ✓ Paul writes about Titus being his partner (KOINONOS) and fellow helper (2 Corinthians 8 v23).
- ✓ The leaders in the church at Jerusalem gave Barnabas and Paul the right hand of fellowship (KOINONIA) to go to the heathen (Galatians 2 v9).
- We can have fellowship through the support of full-time workers.

God's plan is that those who are taught and helped by teachers should support those teachers financially:

"Let him who is taught the word share (KOINONIA) in all good things with him who teaches" (Galatians 6 v6).

- There is also a fellowship which shares possessions with those in need.
- ✓ The believers in Macedonia shared with the needy saints in Jerusalem.

They made *"a certain contribution (KOINONIA) to the poor saints which are at Jerusalem"* (Romans 15 v26).

Paul wrote that these believers urged him to receive and transmit their gift referring to it as *"the fellowship (KOINONIA) of ministering to the saints"* (2 Corinthians 8 v4); and they did this in the light of their own poverty.

- ✓ Paul asked Timothy to encourage those who were rich to be *"ready to distribute, willing to communicate (KOINONIKOS)"* (1 Timothy 6 v18).
- And lastly, there is a fellowship of suffering.

We are all called into the fellowship (KOINONIA) of Christ's sufferings (Philippians 3 v10) and we should rejoice that we are *"partakers"* (KOINONOS) of these sufferings (1 Peter 4 v13). We should be ready to suffer for Christ and at the same time be willing to be *"companions"* (KOINONOS) with our fellow

believers in their sufferings (Hebrews 10 v33). How important it is to weep with those who weep (Romans 12 v15).

You and I need to examine ourselves and our relationship with our fellow believers. Are we guilty of a spirit of superiority, divisiveness and separation? May God give us the grace and help we need to have true and deep fellowship with our fellow believers in every way possible.



Philippians 2:2

*Fulfill my joy by being like-minded,
having the same love, being of one
accord, of one mind."*

Week 10: Theme – The Wisdom Of God

Day 1

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11 v33).

Our theme for this week is one of the most important in the Bible and a study of it is essential for two reasons:

- Wisdom is one of God's greatest attributes and our verse for today tells us about that attribute. An understanding of the wisdom of God will be (as we shall see) a tremendous help to us in our lives and ministries.
- Wisdom is one of the greatest needs in our lives, and our ministries will suffer tremendously without it.

What is wisdom?

- Wisdom is not knowledge. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and, in the case of man, it is the result of learning and study.
- Wisdom is the application and use of the knowledge possessed. It is the ability to decide the right thing and to do it on the basis of the knowledge possessed.

It is possible, for example, for a person to have a lot of knowledge and very little wisdom. It is also possible for a person to have comparatively little knowledge but much wisdom.

But God is different. The Bible tells us that He knows everything. He is, first of all, omniscient. That means that His knowledge is unlimited. David makes this very clear again in Psalm 139 verses 1-6 and he concludes these verses with the words *“such knowledge is too wonderful for me.”* Nothing is hidden or unknown to God (Hebrews 4 v13). He knows everything (1 John 3 v20). But the Bible also tells us that God is wise. This wisdom is not His omniscience; it is the application of that omniscience. It is God **acting** on the basis of what He knows.

Our Bible verse for today combines both of these divine attributes. It speaks about His wisdom and His knowledge, and describes them as rich and valuable, and so deep that both are beyond human understanding.

Paul then goes on to make two statements about God's wisdom:

- The judgments He makes on the basis of His wisdom are *“unsearchable”* – beyond our understanding.

- His ways of action cannot be found out or explained. They are beyond our understanding.

The point that Paul is making over and over again is that what God does on the basis of His wisdom – in our lives and in the lives of others – is so high and so far beyond our understanding that we just have to accept it and believe it – and not argue or debate about it.

Isaiah said exactly the same “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,*” says the LORD. “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts*” (Isaiah 55 v8, 9).

Day 2

“Daniel answered and said: ‘Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His.’” (Daniel 2 v20).

God is wise. Not only is He omniscient and knows everything: but He applies that omniscience and He acts on the basis of what He knows.

God’s wisdom has three aspects or parts and involves three steps:

- **He knows what is best for me.**

He has a definite plan first of all for my life. He knows exactly the kind of person He wants me to be. He has also a definite plan for my service. He knows exactly what He wants me to do and how He wants me to serve Him. The problem is that I am not wise and so I don’t always see and understand what God’s plan is. I am not sure what He wants and expects in my life and I am often confused about what kind of work He wants me to do.

- **He knows how to achieve this plan,** and how to achieve the best for my life and my service. He knows exactly what He wants me to do and how He wants me to serve Him. He knows the very steps and circumstances which are necessary to fulfil His plan for my life and service. He has it all carefully planned and thought out.

My second problem is that I, by myself, have no idea how I can be what God wants me to be, and there is no way I can determine how I should serve Him, on the basis of my faulty knowledge and wisdom. Thus I often don’t understand why certain circumstances occur in my life, and I don’t realize that they are all the result of God’s wisdom.

- **He works to achieve His plan in me and for me.** He works in different ways to do that which is best for me and which will bring most glory to Himself. And so He sends or allows circumstances to come into my life and He allows certain things to happen – all of which will work together to

accomplish His purpose in my life and in my ministry. My problem is that when these things happen I complain and ask, "Why should this happen to me?"

It is therefore essential for me to understand that God's wisdom is active and not passive. It is not just a question of Him knowing what is best for me, and knowing the steps which need to be taken to achieve that. He is at work; He is actively pursuing these steps one by one.

And He is able to do this because His wisdom and His power are closely related. Our verse for today reminds us that God is a God of both wisdom and might. His wisdom determines what needs to be done. His might or power enables Him to do all that He wants to do in my life and through my circumstances.

Why should I worry when I have a God Who knows what He is doing – and is in complete control of every situation? I must never forget the words of Romans 8 v28: "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*"

Day 3

"To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen"
(Romans 16 v27).

God is wise – and He knows what He is doing. But it would be good to stop for a moment and ask ourselves how we know that this is true.

- We know, firstly, through EXPOSITION OF THE WORD OF GOD
The Bible clearly teaches us that God is wise.

Here are several key Bible verses which expound this truth:

- ✓ "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*" (Romans 11 v33).

This verse describes, on the one hand, how extensive and great is the wisdom of God – and then on the other hand how difficult, even impossible, it is for us to understand it.

- ✓ "*To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen"* (Romans 16 v27).

Today's verse shows us that wisdom is not only one of God's main attributes but it is one which should encourage us to worship and glorify Him. The more we understand the truth that God is in complete control and that He knows what He is doing – the more we will worship

Him – and bring Him the glory which He alone deserves. And we will worship Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

- ✓ “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8 v28).

This verse shows God’s wisdom in action, working and controlling every circumstance in our lives to achieve His plan for us. When we come to the place where we believe that everything which happens to us is either sent by God or allowed by Him, and when we can have complete peace in the midst of such circumstances, we have reached the stage of spiritual maturity.

- ✓ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2 v3).

Jesus Christ is God the Son and therefore possesses the divine attribute of omniscience and wisdom – and these are seen as wonderful treasures. He is completely omniscient and completely wise – and He can impart spiritual knowledge and wisdom to us from His great and wonderful treasure.

- ✓ “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1 v30).

This verse teaches again that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the true embodiment of wisdom – and that He can give us the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption which God requires.

Can we doubt the wisdom of God when the Bible teaches it so clearly?

Why not worship Him now on the basis of His wisdom as encouraged in our verse for today.

Day 4

“To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3 v10).

We can see God’s wisdom EXPOUNDED in a number of Bible verses. And we can also see that wisdom EXPLAINED or demonstrated in the Bible:

- God’s wisdom is displayed and demonstrated in CREATION
“O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions” (Psalm 104 v24).

When God created the heavens and the earth – and when He created each of us individuals He did so according to His wisdom. He knew

exactly what He was doing – it was all done according to His plans and purposes.

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4 v11).

➤ God's wisdom is displayed and demonstrated in REVELATION

*“Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: ‘Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for **wisdom** and might are His’ ”* (Daniel 2 v19, 20).

We are by nature spiritually blind and without spiritual understanding. We would understand nothing – unless God revealed it to us (as He in these verses revealed to Daniel the meaning of the vision). God in His wisdom chooses to reveal to mankind that which He wants and plans for them to understand.

➤ God's wisdom is displayed and demonstrated in REDEMPTION

*“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all **wisdom** and prudence”* (Ephesians 1 v7 and 8).

Why did God save us? Why did God save anyone?

He did so according to His wisdom and according to His plan. He knew exactly what He was doing. His choice of us and our salvation were based on His wisdom.

➤ God's wisdom is displayed and demonstrated in THE CHURCH

*“...to the intent that now the manifold **wisdom** of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 3 v10).

To demonstrate His wisdom to every living creature, God chose the church, consisting of all who are saved by Jesus Christ, to show how important we are in His plan and purpose. This is probably the most astounding aspect of God's wisdom. He has chosen to display His wisdom, His plans and His purposes to the world through you and me. This is an amazing truth.

Are we as members of His church displaying God's wisdom in our daily lives?

Day 5

“And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God” (Genesis 45 v7, 8a).

Not only does the EXPOSITION of Bible verses teach us that God is wise; not only does the Bible give an EXPLANATION how that wisdom is displayed; but

the Bible also gives us illustrations or EXAMPLES of God's wisdom in action in the lives of His people. And today we will look at two such examples.

Do you remember the three steps or parts in the wisdom of God? – He knows His plan for us and our lives, He knows how to achieve that plan – and He is working actively to achieve it. And we can see all of this clearly demonstrated in the lives of Joseph and Esther.

Joseph

God had a plan for Joseph since the day he was born. His plan was that he would one day be the saviour from famine of the Egyptians and of his own family. And God knew the steps which were needed to bring Joseph to that position, and He worked in his life according to the steps he had planned:

- He was born into a godly home and displayed a godly character in his youth. And that character was tested and proved by his jealous brothers – who then sent him to Egypt as a slave.
- He was further tested, tried and tempted in Potiphar's house and in prison – but showed his godly character each time.
- He became Prime Minister of Egypt and supplied food during the seven years of famine for the Egyptians and his family.

His brothers thought he would take revenge on them – but he didn't. Instead he assured them that it was God Who was in control and that His wisdom had brought everything to pass.

Esther

Queen Vashti disobeyed her husband; the king looked for a new queen. Esther the Jewess was selected. Haman planned and initiated a plot to kill the Jews. Mordecai warned Esther who spoke to the king and told him about Haman. And the king decreed that the Jews could save themselves – and so they did.

God is not mentioned in the book of Esther – but He is there all the time working in the background and in His wisdom He prepared and raised up Esther to be the saviour of His people.

Mordecai's words to Esther explain the wisdom of God on this matter:

".....who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
(Esther 4 v14b).

And the reason she came was because God in His wisdom brought her there to accomplish His purpose and plan for His people.

Day 6

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12 v24).

We need to realize, as Romans 11 v33 reminds us that God's wisdom is away above and beyond us, and that there are many times when things happen which we cannot understand and which seem completely disastrous to us. But God is wise and knows what He is doing (even if we don't).

There are two more striking EXAMPLES of such divine wisdom in the Word of God.

Stephen

Stephen was one of the outstanding leaders of the early church. He was a very gifted preacher and God used him mightily and did many miracles through him (Acts 6 v8). He was described as a man *"full of faith and the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 6 v5).

But the religious leaders laid hands upon him as he expounded the Word of God to them, threw him out of the city and stoned him to death (Acts 7 v59, 60). How could this happen? How could God allow this young leader of great spirituality and much promise to be murdered?

Human wisdom cannot understand this. But God in His wisdom allowed this to happen – because it was part of His plan. God knew that He would speak through Stephen's death to Saul, the man who would become the greatest of the leaders of the church and the greatest missionary ever; and that turning point in Saul's life would lead him, soon after, to his conversion and the beginning of a wonderful life of service (Acts 7 v58; 8 v1).

Stephen was the *"grain of wheat"* in our verse for today which fell into the ground and died – and through that death *"produces much grain"* (John 12 v24).

The Lord Jesus

But the greatest display of the wisdom of God can be seen in the death of the Lord Jesus. To the world and even to the disciples it was a disaster. But it was all part of God's plan; and what seemed to be a disaster turned out to be the greatest victory, the source of salvation and the greatest source of blessing the world had ever seen (1 Peter 1 v19, 20).

God is in control, and He knows what is best. And the apostles expressed this truth very clearly in their prayer (Acts 4 v27, 28) and in their preaching (Acts 2 v23).

It was all part of the plan of God – and completely fulfilled the prophecy of the Lord Jesus in John 12 v24 that the “*grain of wheat*” would, through its death, produce much fruit.

Are you in a situation or facing a problem you don’t understand – and which might even seem disastrous. Remember that God is wise; He is in control and He knows what He is doing. Trust Him!

Day 7

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8 v28).

For the last six days we have been looking at, and seeking to understand, the wisdom of God. We now need to ask ourselves the question – “How should the wisdom of God, and my understanding of it, affect me?

I believe that there are five answers – five good reactions:

- We must, first of all, believe it – not just in theory but in practice. We need to believe that God knows what He is doing – even though we don’t, that He is in control of every situation, and that He is using all things, difficult though they may be, to help me to be what He wants me to be, and to do what He wants me to do. We need to believe, as our verse for today says, that all these things – good and bad – are for our good.
- We must trust Him completely when difficult things happen – and when we are completely in the dark. Even though we are puzzled and bewildered we must put our hand into His – and leave it there. We should echo the words of Isaiah:
“Behold God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid” (Isaiah 12 v2b).
- We must accept whatever comes with joy and peace – and, at the same time, ask God if there is something we need to learn from what has happened. Paul, for example, had a real problem. He had “*a thorn in the flesh*” (2 Corinthians 12 v7 and 8). And it became a greater problem when he prayed and asked God to take it away, God did not do so.
 But the wonderful truth and conclusion is that Paul learned at least two facts from this situation which God had allowed:
 - ✓ He learned that God had allowed this thorn to keep him humble (2 Corinthians 12 v7):
 - ✓ He learned that God would give him the strength he needed to deal with and overcome his problem (2 Corinthians 12 v9a).

- We must not complain, rebel, feel bitter – or give up. Paul, despite all the problems he faced kept going and did not quit (Acts 26 v 21, 22).
- We must worship Him on the basis of this great and wonderful attribute – His wisdom:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11 v33).

“..... to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen” (Romans 16 v27).



Romans 11 :33

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”

Week 11: Theme – Our Need For Wisdom

Day 1

“Happy is the man who finds wisdom” (Proverbs 3 v13a).

Last week we considered one of God’s greatest and most wonderful attributes – His wisdom. God’s attributes fall into two groups:

- Those attributes which are specially His own and which He does not communicate to us. These include His eternity, His sovereignty, His omniscience and His omnipotence.
- Those attributes which He wants to communicate to us. For example He wants us to be loving, to be holy, and to be faithful. And another one of these communicable attributes is wisdom – He wants us to be wise.

Why Do We Need Wisdom?

It is good to remind ourselves what wisdom is.

Wisdom is not knowledge. Knowledge is easy to obtain. Wisdom is not.

Wisdom is, I repeat, the ability to decide the right thing, and to say or do the right thing (in the right way) on the basis of the knowledge we possess.

“Wisdom is the ability to discern God’s hand in human circumstances, and to apply heavenly judgment to earthly situations.”

We need this wisdom in our lives and in our ministries – and our verse for today tells us that the man who finds it is a happy man.

- We need wisdom to help us walk the right way:
*“Walk in **wisdom** toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.”* (Colossians 4 v5).
- We need wisdom to help us teach the right way:
*“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all **wisdom**, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”* (Colossians 1 v28).
- We need wisdom to help us to write and communicate the right way:
*“ and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the **wisdom** given to him, has written to you”* (2 Peter 3 v15).

And that is why God, in His Word, commands and encourages us to seek wisdom – to become wise and be like the seven men in Acts 6 v3 who were *“full of the Holy Spirit and **wisdom**.”*

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom" (Proverbs 4 v7a).

"Get wisdom, get understanding" (Proverbs 4 v5a).

Do you see your need for wisdom?

Day 2

"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" (Acts 6 v3).

We saw yesterday our need for wisdom and that God wants us to be wise. How can we be wise?

Where Does Our Wisdom Come From?

The answer to this question is given repeatedly in the Word of God:

- There are Bible verses which show us that our wisdom comes from God:
 - ✓ *"For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding"* (Proverbs 2 v6).
(But note that two previous verses remind us that we have a responsibility to look for wisdom).
 - ✓ *"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption"* (1 Corinthians 1 v30).
".... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2 v3).
Both these verses show us that wisdom comes from God through His Son, Jesus Christ, because all the treasures of wisdom are in Him.
- There are many Bible examples of men who received wisdom from God:
 - ✓ Daniel was faced with a problem which neither he or anyone else could solve. The king had demanded an explanation of his dream – but he could not even remember what his dream was. What an impossible situation! There was only one way to solve the problem. Daniel prayed for wisdom – and received it and was able to tell the king his dream and the meaning of it (Daniel 2 v17-23).
 - ✓ Solomon when he was asked by God to name what he would like to receive from Him, chose above all else the gift of wisdom (1 Kings 3 v5-9), and God gave him what he asked for (1 King 3 v12) – and this wisdom was demonstrated immediately (1 Kings 3 v16-28).

- ✓ God filled Joshua with the spirit of wisdom (Deuteronomy 34 v9) as He prepared him for the gigantic task of becoming the leader of the children of Israel after the death of Moses.
- ✓ God equipped Bezaleel with wisdom for the great task of building the tabernacle by “filling him with the Spirit of God in *wisdom*, in understanding and in knowledge” (Exodus 31 v3a). He could never have done his work without that wisdom and ability from God.
- ✓ The first seven deacons in the early church were able to do their key work because God filled them with the Holy Spirit and with wisdom as we see in today’s verse.

It is most important for you and me to know where the wisdom we need comes from. It is completely divine in its origin.

Day 3

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever” (Psalm 111 v10).

We now know that we need wisdom, and it comes from God. And that leads automatically to the next question:

How Can We Receive This Wisdom?

I believe that, according to God’s Word, there are seven steps we need to follow if we are to receive this wisdom from God.

- **Step 1.** We need to realize that we don’t have this wisdom and that we need to have it. This is the first and obvious step to take. If we don’t see the need, we will never see or realize the solution.
And so James when he is writing in his epistle about the receipt of wisdom says “If any of you lack *wisdom* . . .” (James 1 v5a). That’s where it starts. And Solomon writes in Proverbs 11 v2 that wisdom comes to the lowly or humble – to those who see their need of it.
*“When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is *wisdom*”.*
- **Step 2.** We need to give God first place in our lives; and we need to fear and reverence Him as our Lord and Creator:
*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of *wisdom*”* (Psalm 111 v10).
And Solomon repeats this vital statement in Proverbs 1 v7:
Our first responsibility is not to seek wisdom or pray for it – but to seek and fear the Lord from Whom wisdom comes.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (Prov. 3 v5)
If we trust Him and acknowledge Him He will give us the direction and wisdom we need.

- **Step 3.** We need to study God's Word – regularly, systematically and thoughtfully. God has spoken to us in His Word and has given us all the guidelines we need concerning what wisdom is, and how to receive it. We cannot receive something if we don't know what it is and how to identify it.

In Psalm 119 verses 97-104 we are told that God's commandments make us wise (verse 98) and that through His precepts and testimony in His Word we can have understanding – more understanding than others.

"You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies. Through Your precepts I get understanding" (Psalm 119 v98 and 104).

And Paul encourages us in Colossians 3 v16 to let *"the Word of Christ dwell in us richly"* and reminds us that if we do so the result is *"wisdom"*.

Have you and I taken these first three steps?

Day 4

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him"
(James 1 v5).

If we have followed the first three steps we looked at yesterday, we are now ready for the fourth step:

- **Step 4.** We need to pray and ask God for wisdom.
In our verse for today James exhorts and encourages the person who lacks wisdom to ask God for it, knowing that God is ready to give such wisdom freely to all who ask Him.
This is a wonderful encouragement and a very special promise.
- **Step 5.** We need to believe that God will give it.
We must not stop with step 4. It is not enough just to pray and ask God for wisdom. James in the following verse emphasizes that we really need to believe that God will give us the wisdom we ask for:
"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1 v6).
If we don't believe, we don't receive.
- **Step 6.** We need to develop our wisdom.

We must not even stop with step 5. There is another step to take. Receiving wisdom is not just a passive process – we don't just ask and believe and then wait. The Bible makes it clear that we have a responsibility to do what we can to develop that gift of wisdom.

The Psalmist tells us to “*apply our hearts unto wisdom*” (Psalm 90 v12). Application is needed. Solomon in Proverbs tells us that a wise man will benefit from rebuke and can become wiser through instruction:

“Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (Proverbs 9 v8, 9).

To develop wisdom we need to keep studying God's Word – and then to put into practice what is contained there.

➤ **Step 7.** We need to pray for others.

There is still another step. We should follow the example of the Apostle Paul and pray that other believers will also receive this wisdom from God.

“...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Ephesians 1 v17).

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Colossians 1 v9).

Where are you and I as far as these steps are concerned?

Day 5

“This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic” (James 3 v15).

Throughout this week we have been examining the theme of wisdom and seeking to find out from the Bible how we can be wise.

The next question we need to ask is:

How Can We Know That We Are Wise?

All the spiritual qualities and fruits which God wants to see in our lives will be recognizable and visible. They are not just words or doctrines. There must be evidence to show that they are there and that they are genuine. So if we are wise it should be possible for us, and others, to see the results of that wisdom in our lives. What are these results according to the Word of God? How can we identify wisdom?

It is necessary, first of all, to understand that the Bible teaches, especially in James 3 v13-18, that there are two kinds of wisdom – and that each kind can be identified by its results.

He starts off by asking a question – “*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge?*” (James 3 v13a). And then he answers his question by stating in the second part of that verse that a wise man will demonstrate and give evidence of that wisdom by his way of life and especially by his meekness or humility:

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3 v13).

And in the following verse he explains that the person with envy, bitterness and strife in his heart is not “*a wise man*”.

“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth” (James 3 v14).

He then identifies the two kinds of wisdom.

1. EARTHLY WISDOM

The first kind of wisdom is described in our verse for today as earthly wisdom. This verse describes this wisdom in four ways:

- ✓ It is not from above. It is not the wisdom which God gives. It is another kind of wisdom.
- ✓ It is earthly or worldly in its ORIGIN, and is based upon worldly principles. It functions on a human level only, and is purely pragmatic in its operation.
- ✓ It is sensual or fleshly in its MOTIVES – and is driven purely and simply by human desires and wants.
- ✓ It is devilish or demonic in its RESULTS because it is the type of wisdom which the devil wants us to have.

We need to realize that it is possible for a Christian to be wise in this sense because James is addressing believers and warning them against having this kind of wisdom.

Can we identify this earthly wisdom? James says we can and we will see tomorrow in more detail what the evidences of this earthly wisdom are.

Day 6

“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (James 3 v16).

God wants us to be wise. But He warns us through His Word that there are two kinds of wisdom and that we should avoid what James calls earthly or worldly wisdom which is “*earthly, sensual and devilish*” (James 3 v15).

And James tells us in our verse for today, that there are four identifying results or evidences of this earthly wisdom:

- “*Envy*”. This includes jealousy of others’ gifts and position – along with selfish ambition and “religious politics”. This result is also mentioned in verse 14.
- “*Self-seeking*”. This includes selfishness, pride and all kinds of “in fighting” and this is also included in verse 14.
- “*Confusion*”. Envy and self-seeking lead to instability, discord, strife, confusion and loss of blessing.
- “*Every evil thing*”. This phrase covers all the other evidences of earthly wisdom.

If any of these evidences are obvious or can be seen in our lives, they are the fruits of an earthly wisdom – and we need to do something radical about it.

It is possible for a Christian to have a degree, or even a large degree, of this earthly wisdom. And he makes decisions and bases much of his life and even his service on the wrong kind of wisdom. We know we have this kind of wisdom if it leads to envy, self-seeking, confusion and anything else which is evil.

2. WISDOM FROM ABOVE

But there is another wisdom, the wisdom God wants to give us. This is the wisdom our verse for tomorrow speaks about which we need in our lives and ministries and it comes from God.

If we have this wisdom there will be a number of evidences – and the Bible spells them out very clearly:

- Purity. This includes cleanness, transparency and honesty – in myself, in my motives, in my attitudes, in my words, and in my actions and reactions – before God and men.
- Peace. This wisdom is “*then peaceable*”. This result contrasts with the strife which is one of the evidences of earthly wisdom. The wise person will make peace, not break peace (Matthew 5 v9).
- Gentleness. This quality doesn’t fight, defend, lose temper, sulk or criticize. This is also called the “*meekness of wisdom*” (James 3 v13). We always need to remember and put 2 Timothy 2 v24 into practice:

How well does our wisdom measure up to these three evidences?

Day 7

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3 v17).

How can we recognize the wisdom which God gives in our lives and ministries? What are its results and evidences?

In James 3 v13, 17, 18 a number of these evidences are given including, as we saw yesterday, purity, peace and gentleness. James also in these verses gives us at least four more evidences:

- *"Easy to be entreated" or "willing to yield"*. This means that we should always be willing to yield, to others and be open to their views. It means we will not be stubborn, but always be willing to take instruction and advice.
"Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more" (Ecclesiastes 4 v13).
- *"Full of mercy and good fruits"*. We need to forgive others as we have been forgiven and we will not harbour grudges. Blessed are the merciful and those who forgive. If we don't forgive, the results will eat us up.
"Even as Christ forgave you, so also do you" (Colossians 3 v13b).
- *"Without partiality"* We need to take a clear stand on principles and not be swayed back and forth by pragmatism. We are reminded in Deuteronomy 6 v18:
"And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers."
- *"Without hypocrisy."* We should not wear masks and try to pretend we are what we are not. This was one of the main sins of the Pharisees. Honesty is essential at all times.
"You are they who justify yourselves before men but God knows your hearts" (Luke 16 v25 and 15a).

If these results and evidences of God's wisdom, are seen in our lives it will be obvious to others. So we need to examine ourselves to see if we are displaying the right kind of wisdom.

These results are qualities which are rooted in the wisdom of God and perfectly displayed in the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is pure in His character, and actions and He is the Prince of Peace. He is gentle and does not fight, lose His temper, criticize or withhold forgiveness. He never fluctuates or pretends. As we receive and develop His wisdom we will become more and more like Him

*To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus
All I ask to be like Him
All through life's journey from earth to glory
All I ask - to be like Him.*

*To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus
All I ask to be like Him
So pure and holy, so meek and lowly
All I ask - to be like Him*

May we be so.



James 1 :5

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of
God, who gives to all liberally and without
reproach, and it will be given to him."*

Week 12:

Theme – Jesus Came

Day 1

*“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ **Jesus came** into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1 v15).*

These two words JESUS CAME are, surely, the most wonderful and the most thrilling words that anyone could hear – especially when we understand what they mean and all that is involved:

One of the greatest and most pivotal truths in the Bible is the wonderful truth of the INCARNATION.

This word in English comes from the Latin word CARNE which means “flesh”, so “incarnation” simply means “becoming flesh”. The Triune God had always been purely and completely “SPIRIT” – invisible and without a body. There were times in the Old Testament when God the Son appeared onto people (e.g. Genesis 18 v1; Joshua 5 v14) and took a body temporarily. But He, like God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, remained “SPIRIT”.

But that was all now to change – in the incarnation God the Son “*became flesh*”. He took a human body – and He still has that body – though now glorified.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1 v14).

And here are our two words – JESUS CAME.

- These two words are important because they form and verbalize the focal truth of the whole Bible:
 - ✓ The Old Testament looks forward to His coming: “He will come.”
 - ✓ The New Testament looks backward to His coming. “He has come.”
- These two words are important because they are recognized by the world in its record of time. Time is dated from His coming:
 - ✓ B.C. dates time before His coming.
 - ✓ A.D. dates time after His coming. Each year since then is ANNO DOMINO (a year of the Lord).
- These two words thrilled the hearts of the apostles

Paul realized how great a sinner he had been – denying and mocking the Lord Jesus, persecuting His Church, and harming and killing His followers. He believed, as we see in our verse for today, he was the chief of sinners. But his heart was thrilled when he learned the great truth that “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*” – and that He came to save him. Is it any wonder that he called this wonderful fact and truth “*a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance*” – and that he wanted everyone to hear it and believe it?

Do we have that same thrill in our heart as we realize and believe that JESUS CAME to save us?

Day 2

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1 v18). The Lord JESUS CAME to our world just over 2,000 years ago. That is our theme for this week.

But the big question we want to ask this week is – why did He come? The Bible gives us seven answers – each of which we are going to examine:

- The Lord JESUS CAME to SHOW man what God is like.

Men and women down through the years have had two great questions:

- ✓ Is there a God?
- ✓ What is God like?

The first question is relatively easy to answer. We know there is a God because we see His work in creation, because of the Bible and its teaching, and because of His work in our hearts.

But what is God like?

We know He is powerful because He has created everything; and we can learn much about Him from His Word, the Bible. But the wonderful truth is that God has revealed Himself, showing us what He is like, in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Lord JESUS CAME to SHOW us what God is like.

In John 1 v1 the Lord Jesus is called the Word and we are told that the Word is God. And John 1 v14 tells us He became man – and that His glory, the glory of the Father’s Son, was seen by mankind.

The Bible tells us in many places that the Lord Jesus is the true and exact revelation of God:

- ✓ He is God manifest in the flesh: (1 Timothy 3 v16).

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory."

- ✓ He is the image of the invisible God: (Colossians 1 v15).
"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation"
- ✓ He is the express image of God's Person: (Hebrews 1 v3).
"Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."
- ✓ And He said He was the revelation of His Father (John 14 v9):
"Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

God the Father is Spirit and invisible; but the Lord JESUS came to reveal God to us, and show us what He is like.

That's the first reason He CAME.

Day 3

"The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!'" (John 7 v46).

Why did the Lord JESUS COME to our world? He came firstly to reveal God to us and to show us what God is like. But there was another reason:

- The Lord JESUS CAME to TEACH us
Theologians explain that the Lord Jesus has three offices or ministries. He is our Prophet, our Priest and our King:
 - ✓ As our Prophet He teaches us.
 - ✓ As our Priest he died for us and intercedes for us.
 - ✓ As our King he rules over us.

The main ministry of a prophet is to reveal and teach the Word of God. And the Lord Jesus came to our world to be our Prophet – to reveal the Word of God and to teach us.

We read in Hebrews 1 v2 that, *"God has in these last days spoken to us by His Son."* And the Lord Jesus made it clear to His disciples and to others that He was communicating to the world, and teaching them, what His Father wanted them to hear:

"I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him" (John 8 v26).

“For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak” (John 12 v49).

Nicodemus recognized this fact when he said in John 3 v2:

“Rabbi (Master), we know that You are a teacher come from God.”

The Lord Jesus came to bring us the Word of God, to be our Prophet – and to teach us what God wants us to be and what God wants us to do. And as such He was, and is, the greatest Teacher ever.

Consequently, it is no wonder that those who listened to Him said in the words of our memory verse: *“Never man spoke like this man”* and it is understandable that the people were *“astonished at His doctrine for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes”* (Matthew 7 v28, 29).

Just imagine what the world would be like without the teaching of the Lord Jesus – if He had not come to teach us. What a tragedy it would be if we didn’t have, and couldn’t read, the Sermon on the Mount, Nicodemus’ conversation with the Lord Jesus and wonderful verses like John 3 v16, the stories of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Sower and the seed, the ten virgins, the Shepherd and the sheep and the great supper – and those wonderful three chapters in John’s Gospel (John 14, 15 and 16)

when the Lord Jesus gave special teaching to His little group of disciples.

He came to teach us about God the Father, about the Holy Spirit and about Himself. And He came to teach us about ourselves, our sin and our needs. And in addition He came to teach us how we could become what God wanted us to be – how we could be saved by faith and how we could live for Him.

Let us today be really thankful that the Lord JESUS CAME to TEACH us.

Day 4

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you”

(John 13 v14, 15).

The Lord JESUS CAME to show us what God is like, and to be our Teacher and Prophet. But there was also a third and very important reason why He came:

- The Lord JESUS CAME to be an EXAMPLE for us and to show us how we should live or how we should aim to live. God’s plan for every man, woman, boy and girl who has trusted Jesus Christ is to make each of us, more and more, like Jesus Christ, in our daily walk. He came to this earth to be our

example – and the Bible gives us at least three ways that He wants us to imitate Him:

- ✓ He wants us to be HUMBLE as He was (Philippians 2 v1-11)
Paul explained first of all that Jesus Christ was God (verse 6) but that He was willing to leave Heaven, become a man and a servant or slave:
“He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2 v7).
And how, even more than that, He became obedient to death:
“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2 v8).
He humbled Himself and did all that for our salvation.
But Paul also tells us in verse 5 that we are to become humble like Him:
“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2 v5).
- ✓ He wants us to be THOUGHTFUL as He was (John 13 v1-17).
The disciples were thoughtless. Either they did not see the need to wash the feet of others – or they did see it and were not willing to do it. But the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, got up, laid aside His outer garments, wrapped a towel around Himself and washed all their feet. And then in the words of today's verses He told them that He had given them an example – and showed them that they should be thoughtful like Himself.
- ✓ He wants us to be QUIET as He was (1 Peter 2 v21-23).
“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him Who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2 v21-23).
Peter writes in these verses about the suffering of the Lord Jesus. He was reviled and He suffered. But He did not revile in return. He did not threaten. He was quiet. He said nothing. Instead He committed Himself to His Heavenly Father – and left everything in His Hands. And Peter tells us that this was *“an example that we should follow in His steps”* – and react to persecution and suffering in the same way.

Are we becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus – more humble, more thoughtful and more quiet?

Day 5

"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17 v4).

The Lord JESUS CAME to show us what God is like, to speak to us and teach us the words of God, and to set an example for us.

But perhaps the fourth reason is the most important of all:

- The Lord JESUS CAME to do the WORK which His Father had given Him to do – as shown in our verse for today.

Through an agreement or covenant between God the Father and God the Son, the Lord Jesus came into the world (Hebrews 10 v5) to be a sacrifice and offering for the sin of the world. He came (Hebrews 10 v7) to do the will of His Father – and to finish the work He had given Him to do.

"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.' " (Hebrews 10 v5)

"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come; In the volume of the book it is written of Me; to do Your will, O God.' " (Hebrews 10 v7).

This work which He accomplished and finished had two parts:

✓ IN HIS LIFE

He came to live a perfect life, to obey and fulfill God's law. He could never have been an offering and sacrifice for sin if He had not been completely perfect. And His Father testified that He was perfect, and that He had fulfilled and accomplished His work – in His life.

"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" (Matthew 17 v5).

This is called by the theologians His active obedience.

His life was *"without blemish and without spot"* (1 Peter 1 v18, 19) and so He could become the sacrificial lamb Who would shed His blood for us and our sin.

✓ IN HIS DEATH. He could now offer Himself as a perfect spotless sacrifice for sin on the cross.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10 v45).

"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9 v28a).

"And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2 v2).

This is called by the theologians His passive obedience. And after He had taken the punishment for our sins He cried out "*It is finished*" (John 19 v30).

How terrible it would have been for us if He had not come and if He had not accomplished the work which His Father gave Him to do – so that you and I could be saved and have eternal life.

Day6

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19 v10).

Our verse for today is one of the best known and most loved verses in the Bible and it is echoed in Matthew 18 v11 and Matthew 9 v13:

"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18 v11).

For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9 v13b).

➤ The Lord JESUS CAME to seek and to save that which was lost

You and I can be saved on the basis of the work which He finished. And that was why He came and why He lived a perfect life and why He died a sacrificial and substitutionary death. He did it for us and because of His great love for us.

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53 v5, 6).

And now, today, any man, woman, boy or girl can be saved if they turn from their sin and put their trust in Jesus Christ. And when they do this He gives them PARDON for the past and a wonderful PROSPECT for the future.

But by ourselves we would never trust the Lord Jesus. By nature we are spiritually dead, and we are enemies of God.

And so the Lord Jesus seeks us, looks for us, calls us and enables us to trust Him as our Saviour.

Zacchaeus, like us, was a sinner and lost. The Lord Jesus came to Jericho where Zacchaeus lived and one of the reasons He came to that city was to seek and to save Zacchaeus. The Lord Jesus came to the tree where Zacchaeus was perched, looked up and said to Zacchaeus "*Come down*". And he did so and he received Him into his house and into his life – and he was saved and changed.

Our key verse tells us that the Lord Jesus came to seek and to save the lost – in this case, Zacchaeus. And He still comes to us today through the Holy Spirit and He still seeks the lost. Is it possible that someone reading this is lost – and not saved? The Lord Jesus is looking for you and wants to save you. Trust Him and He will.

He did not come to judge the world, He did not come to blame.

He did not only come to seek. It was to save He came.

And when we call Him Saviour, and when we call Him Saviour,

And when we call Him Saviour we call Him by His Name.

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3 v17).

Day 7

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10 v10).

I am so glad that the Lord JESUS CAME to this world – to show me what God was like, to be my teacher, to give me an example of how to live, to do and to finish the work of salvation given to Him by His Father, and then to seek me and to save me.

But He also came for one more purpose – a seventh purpose. He came that I might have life – and have it more abundantly.

➤ The Lord JESUS CAME to meet my every need

He didn’t just come to save me and give me eternal life for the future but, as our verse for today says, He came to give me an abundant and full life for the present.

Yesterday we saw that when we trusted Jesus Christ He gave us PARDON as far as our past was concerned, and a wonderful PROSPECT for our future in eternity. But He also gives us an abundant life for the present:

✓ He gives us PEACE

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14 v27).

His greatest gift is eternal life which we receive when we trust Him as our Saviour. His second greatest gift is the one He offers us as believers as a part of this abundant life – the gift of peace which we can all enjoy.

✓ He gives us PURITY

"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17 v15).

The Lord Jesus prays for us – that we will be kept from evil, that we will be pure and be able to resist temptation and He enables us through the Holy Spirit Who lives in us (if we are believers) to *"walk in the Spirit and not fulfil the lust of the flesh"* (Galatians 5 v16).

✓ He gives us POWER

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1 v8).

When we have a life which is abundant, we do not only receive from Him, but we serve Him with all our hearts. But we cannot do this acceptably in our own strength; so the Lord Jesus gives us the power and ability to serve Him through the Holy Spirit Who lives in us.

What a wonderful life He came to give us – a life of PEACE, PURITY and POWER.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for COMING to this earth, and thank You for all You have done for me. Help me to love You more and serve You better.



John 10:10b

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Week 13:

Theme – Stephen, The First Christian Martyr

Day 1

“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ “ (Matthew 25 v21).

Stephen has always been one of my favourite Bible characters. I have always appreciated his life and ministry very much and I believe that he was the kind of man God wants us to be.

There are five features in the life and ministry of Stephen which make him such an outstanding person and example to follow. We are going to look at these in some detail this week – to see what we can learn from them and what we can apply to our own lives and ministries:

His Faithfulness

Faithfulness means, primarily, that we keep at the work which God has given us, and that we don’t quit or give up. Our verse for today reminds us that God rewards us and commends us not for our ability – but for our faithfulness.

And Stephen was an excellent example of faithfulness.

The early Church had a problem (Acts 6 v1). Some of the widows in the church who were Greeks felt they were being neglected and were not receiving as much from the church as some of the other women who were Hebrews. As a result the church chose seven men who would take on the responsibility of looking after these women, and others with needs, so that the leaders of the church could concentrate on their ministry of preaching and praying. One of these seven men was Stephen. His first responsibility therefore in the church was a minor and rather mundane one and a ministry which was not at all exciting and dramatic. But he accepted that responsibility to “*serve tables*” (Acts 6 v2) – and I am sure he did it well and faithfully.

Later on, he would have a greater responsibility; but it was necessary that he should grow into that responsibility. He, first of all, needed to demonstrate his faithfulness in a smaller and more humble position.

The same principle can be found right through the Bible. Perhaps the best Old Testament equivalent to Stephen was Joseph and his faithfulness. He was willing to take a lower place as a slave and then as a prisoner in captivity; but each time he was faithful to the responsibility given to him. Eventually God raised him up to a very important position as Prime Minister of Egypt.

And we need to ask ourselves if we are willing, or would be willing, to serve God in a position of less importance and less responsibility – in the background – and show Him that we are faithful.

Day 2

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6 v3).

When Stephen was appointed to be one of the seven who would look after the needs of the women in the church at Jerusalem and would serve tables, he demonstrated HIS FAITHFULNESS. Although it seemed a minor ministry compared to that of the apostles, he devoted himself to it.

But it is interesting to see the reason why Stephen (and the other six) were chosen for this responsibility – and to examine the qualifications demanded for them, and for their ministry. The main qualification was that they should be, as our verse for today tells us, *“full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”*.

His Fullness

Stephen then was chosen because he was full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6 v3). Later, in verse 5, he himself is described as *“full of faith and the Holy Spirit”* and then in verse 8 he is described as *“full of faith and power”*. And in chapter 7 v55 it is repeated once more that he was *“full of the Holy Spirit”*.

What does it mean to be *“full of the Holy Spirit”*? What did it mean for Stephen and what does it mean for us because we too are commanded to be *“filled with the Spirit”* (Ephesians 5 v18)? There is much confusion on this subject in Christian circles. Some see the fullness of the Spirit as one special experience some time after conversion. Some see it as a very critical experience which results in special results such as *“speaking in tongues”*.

But there is a very simple and completely biblical explanation:

- Being filled with the Holy Spirit simply means being under the control of the Holy Spirit:
 - ✓ The Greek word *“filled”* could be translated by the word *“controlled”*.

- ✓ In Ephesians 5 v18 we are commanded not to be filled with wine (which obviously means not to be drunk or controlled by wine) but, in contrast, to be filled or controlled by the Spirit; and the equivalent verse in Colossians 3 v16 shows that this involves “*the word of Christ dwelling in us richly in all wisdom.*”
- ✓ The command to be filled with the Spirit is similar and identical to other commands such as “*Walk in the Spirit*” (Galatians 5 v16), “*Be led by the Spirit*” (Galatians 5 v18), “*Live by the Spirit*” (Galatians 5 v25).
- Being filled with the Spirit is not a once-for-all experience; it is a progressive day-to-day life of obedience under the control of the Holy Spirit. In the command “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5 v18) the verb used is in the present continuous tense – and could be translated “*Be you constantly being filled with the Spirit*”. And the word “*walk*” in Galatians 5 gives the same explanation of progress and continuity.

Stephen was therefore a man who lived each day under the control of the Holy Spirit. He was “*filled (or full of) the Holy Spirit*”.

Day 3

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6 v8).

The fullness of the Holy Spirit always has results and we can know we are filled with the Holy Spirit when the results are seen in our lives and ministries.

In Ephesians 5 v19-21 Paul gives four results of the fullness of the Spirit:

- We will **speak** to our fellow Christians in the right way.
- We will **speak** to God in the right way.
- We will **be thankful** to God for everything.
- We, as Christians, will **submit** to each other.

And it is interesting to see how much our tongue, and the correct use of it, is involved in this fullness.

In Acts chapter 6 we are given a number of results in the life and ministry of Stephen resulting from the fact that he was filled with the Spirit:

- He was “*full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom*” (Acts 6 v3). The first result of that fullness was that he was wise – in his personal RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS (and this would be especially necessary as he sought to help the women under his care). Then he was wise in his preaching ministry. “*And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke*” (Acts 6 v10).

He was so wise that his listeners could not resist or oppose or find fault with what he was saying.

- He was “full of **faith** and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6 v5). The second result of his fullness was a strengthening and deepening of his RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. It is clear that he had a close intimacy with his Saviour in Whom he had complete faith and trust.
- He was “full of **faith** and **power**” (Acts 6 v8). The fullness of the Holy Spirit in his life, and the faith which he had in God, showed themselves, as our verse for today tells us, in HIS MINISTRY in “wonders and miracles”. Stephen had now “graduated” from serving tables to preaching and performing (in the power of the Holy Spirit) great miracles. And many people were being saved (Acts 6 v7).
- “Being full of the Holy Spirit” enabled him to have **peace** in the face of intense suffering and in his martyr's death (Acts 7 v55).

Stephen, then, was filled with the Holy Spirit; he lived each day under His control. It was the Holy Spirit Who enabled him to be a man “of honest report” (Acts 6 v3) - and to do did great wonders among the people.

And if we want to be like Stephen we need to be filled with, or under the control of, the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5 v18) and we will then have in our lives and ministries wisdom, faith, power and peace when faced with suffering.

Day 4

“And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke” (Acts 6 v10).

The Bible has provided us with many wonderful examples of men and women whose lives and ministries we should imitate – and one of the most outstanding of these is Stephen – his FAITHFULNESS and his FULLNESS:

Today we see a further aspect of this man of God which we need to imitate.

His Familiarity With the Bible

In those wonderful days of the early church we read in Acts 6 v7:

“Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

God was really blessing and the church was growing. And one of the men God was using in a special way was Stephen. He had originally been appointed as a deacon to serve tables and look after those in need. But God was now using him in a wonderful evangelistic ministry, and his ministry was one of the reasons the church was growing as it was:

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6 v8).

But as Stephen preached he faced opposition, and a number of the Jewish leaders started to argue with him and disagree with what he was saying. But we read in today's verse that they were not able to resist the wisdom with which he spoke. Why? Because here was a man who knew the Word of God and was able to more than hold his own with the men who thought they were experts with the Bible.

And when, as a result of their opposition and aggression, these leaders brought him before the council and accused him of blasphemy (Acts 6 v14) Stephen spoke to them at length in chapter 7 and displayed an amazing understanding of the Old Testament:

- He outlined, step by step, the facts of the Word of God starting with Abraham in verse 2 and proceeding step by step to Solomon and his temple (Acts 7 v47).
- He also dealt with a number of key doctrines of God – His glory (verse 2), His judgment (verse 7), His faithfulness (verses 8, 10 and 17) His Presence (verse 9), His power (verse 10), His holiness (verse 33) and His power in creation (verse 49).
- He also included teaching about Jesus Christ, the Son of God – His words (Acts 6 v14), His Person (7 v52), His death (7 v52), His exaltation and presence in heaven (7 v56).
- He even introduced teaching about God the Holy Spirit (Acts 7 v51).

And he would have continued with his message – especially about the Lord Jesus (Acts 7 v52) – if they had allowed him to do so.

What a message! What an amazing familiarity with the Word of God which could only have come through many hours of study. Are we as familiar with the Word of God as we should be?

Day 5

“And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel” (Acts 6 v15).

We have seen Stephen's FAITHFULNESS, FULLNESS and FAMILIARITY with the Word of God and we are praying that we can become more and more like him. But perhaps the greatest of all the lessons we need to learn is contained in that event for which he is most remembered – his death and martyrdom - his FAREWELL. Stephen became the first Christian martyr – and we approach that sacred event with reverence and respect.

His Farewell

Stephen was the first person to die as a martyr for Jesus Christ – but what a death! What a farewell! Stephen was a man who did not only know how to live; he also knew how to suffer and die. And we need to learn from him how we can and should face suffering in our lives and ministries when it comes.

We need to see and appreciate four aspects of Stephen's death and farewell:

➤ **HOW HE SHONE** (Acts 6 v15)

Our verse for today tells us that they “*saw his face as it had been the face of an angel*”.

This was surely a reflection from His Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Stephen had become more and more like the Lord Jesus during his life – in the process of sanctification; and now towards the end of that wonderful life he was more like Him than ever before – and he shone.

➤ **WHAT HE SAW** (Acts 7 v56)

God opened the Heavens before his eyes and he looked through and saw the glory of God. What a sight that must have been! And then he saw the Lord Jesus. He was not seated in His usual place at the right Hand of His Father. But He was standing and ready to welcome His dear servant home. Isn't it wonderful that, at this special time of need, when Stephen was suffering and close to his martyrdom, that he should have this special revelation of Heaven and especially of the Lord Jesus Christ? And doesn't this show us that in an hour of special need and suffering, our Saviour draws near and gives us a revelation of Himself, and a special experience of His peace to prepare us for what is going to happen and to bring us safely and joyfully through it.

Are you facing a problem or difficult situation at this time? Remember that He is with you (Matthew 28 v20) and that He has the power you need to get through it safely and joyfully (Matthew 28 v18).

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ “

(Matthew 28 v18).

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28 v20b).

Day 6

“Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7 v60).

As we have been looking at Stephen's farewell, departure and martyrdom we have seen HOW HE SHONE and WHAT HE SAW. And now:

➤ WHAT HE SUFFERED

We can see his suffering described in three ways:

- ✓ First of all they gnashed at him with their teeth (verse 54).
I presume, from this statement, that, somehow, they bit him.
- ✓ Then they beat him with their fists and feet (verse 57).
- ✓ Then, at last, they stoned him (verse 58) – and these stones were not little pebbles. They were rocks – and they would have caused tremendous physical damage – and eventually death.

➤ WHAT HE SAID

- ✓ First of all he told those in the council and those standing around and listening what he could see (verse 56):
 - He told them that he could see the glory of God. This must have been a magnificent sight as he stood there looking up into Heaven.
 - And then he told them that he could see the Lord Jesus standing on the right hand of God – the One they had rejected and crucified.
It is not surprising that they cried out and covered their ears.
- ✓ And then, after they stoned him, he committed himself to the Lord Jesus and asked Him to receive his spirit (verse 59). But he did it so quietly and calmly and with complete confidence in His Saviour.
- ✓ And lastly and most wonderfully of all, he asked the Lord Jesus, with a loud voice, to forgive those who were stoning them and asked Him
“not to lay their sin to their charge” (verse 60).

Isn't it remarkable that the very last thing Stephen did, and the very last words he uttered, was a prayer for THEM (not for himself) – and for their forgiveness. How closely he once again followed the example of the Lord Jesus in His death. Like his Master, he suffered and died at the hands, or request, of the religious leaders and also like Him, he asked that his persecutors and killers be forgiven. And just as forgiveness was available to the murderers of the Lord Jesus (and a number of them no doubt were saved under the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost); God's forgiveness was also available to the murderers of Stephen. We know of at least one of them who trusted Christ. And what a one!

May we be strengthened by God the Holy Spirit so that we can know how to live and die like Stephen. And may we always like Stephen and the Lord Jesus have that special ability (which comes alone from God) to be able to forgive those who harm us.

Day 7

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12 v24).

Throughout this week we have been looking at a wonderful man – a man whose example we should seek to follow. And we have seen his FAITHFULNESS, his FULLNESS, his FAMILIARITY with the Word of God, and his FAREWELL. There is just one more aspect of his life and ministry to look at.

His Fruitfulness

The story of Stephen (and the ministry of Stephen) did not finish with his death. Throughout his relatively short life he had been very fruitful. He had helped needy women and he had served tables; he had preached the Word of God and performed miracles – and many people had been saved through his ministry.

But now he was dead, and we may wonder why God allowed such a fruitful life and ministry to (seemingly) come to an end. We cannot be absolutely sure about the answer to this question. But we do know that one amazing result of that death was the conversion of the greatest missionary, apostle and Christian. And this could well have been the greatest fruit of all resulting from the life and death of this wonderful man.

Saul, the Pharisee, was not only consenting to Stephen's death (Acts 8 v1); but he was fully involved in it – and perhaps even the leader of what took place because the actual killers laid their clothes at Saul's feet (Acts 6 v58). It may be that because he was a Pharisee he couldn't actually throw the stones, but he must have encouraged the others to do so.

But Saul never forgot what he had seen in Stephen and what he had heard from him. These were to be like "pricks" in the days which lay ahead; and even if Saul kicked against these pricks (Acts 9 v5) the day came when he could do so no longer and he was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9 v6).

So Saul's conversion, and all that took place as a result of that conversion, were the result, in God's Hand, of Stephen's death.

And, like Samson in the Old Testament, Stephen's greatest fruitfulness and results of his life and ministry took place at his death.

Stephen was a corn of wheat, like that mentioned in our Bible verse, which fell into the ground and died – and, as a result of that death, produced much fruit.

And if you are in a difficult situation at present, it could well be that God is going to make that difficulty into a blessing which will bear fruit. The words of John 13 v7 could apply to your situation as it did to Stephen's.

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.' " (John 13 v7).

Each of us could now, at the end of this week, pray "Oh God, please help me live and serve you like Stephen did – and also, at the end, help me to die in a way which will bring glory to Yourself. Amen."



John 12:24

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."

Week 14:

Theme – The Blessing Of Old Age

Day 1

“I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread”

(Psalm 37 v25).

This might seem to be a strange theme for this week. I trust it will be a help to those, like myself, who are experiencing and enjoying their old age. But if you are not at that stage yet, you will be one day – and these meditations will help prepare you for that time. And also I trust that they will help you to understand us “old folks” and know how to help, encourage, and even use us.

I obviously couldn't have written these meditations twenty or thirty years ago. At least I couldn't have done so from personal experience. But I can now – because I am old (and enjoying it) and I can echo the words of our verse for today, *“I have been young and now am old.”*

Biblical Teaching on Old Age

The Bible has a lot to say about old age – and it teaches us three ways older people can help us:

- We need to LISTEN to what older people SAY

The testimony and witness of an old person is important – especially if it is recorded in the Bible. These people are best qualified to speak from their experiences.

- ✓ And so King David wrote the words of our Bible verse for today when he was old. He starts off with the simple statement that he is old – and then he gives a testimony that throughout his whole life he had never seen the righteous forsaken or having to beg for bread. An old person is qualified to give a testimony like this because he can look back over his long years of experience. His words reflect reality and not imagination.

Old people have experienced the goodness and faithfulness of God more than anyone else and have had all kinds of experiences from which they have learned many lessons – and they need to be listened to.

- ✓ And Jethro, also an older man, gave Moses his son-in-law advice he had garnered from experience – to delegate much of his work to other leaders – for his own benefit, and for the people’s benefit (Exodus 18 v17-23).

Moses could have resented and ignored the advice from this old man. But he didn’t. He listened to what he said – and he put it into practice (Exodus 18 v24) – and in so doing he and his people were greatly helped and blessed.

So don’t ignore or despise the advice and testimony of the old and experienced Christians with whom you come into contact. They can be of great help to you.

Day 2

“The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendour of old men is their gray head” (Proverbs 20 v29).

As we continue to study what the Bible teaches about old age we remember our first lesson – we need to LISTEN to what old people SAY, and benefit from their experience and wisdom. And then secondly:

- We need to LOOK at what old people SHOW.

What do I mean by that?

Solomon writes in Proverbs 20 v29 the words of our memory verse:

“The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head”

This verse tells us that young men show their strength and should be admired for it. But it also tells us that many old men display a beauty of life which has come from their many years of communion with God. These old men (and women) with their splendour and gray heads should be a joy and a source of wisdom to all who are young – and an example for them to follow.

There is nothing more beautiful than the life and example of a man (or woman) who has grown old graciously – and we should all make it our goal to do this.

Have you ever read this old man’s prayer?

An Old Man's Prayer

Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older, and will some day be old.

Keep me from getting talkative, and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking that I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to try to straighten out everybody's affairs.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details - give me wings to get to the point.

I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others' pains. Help me to endure them with patience.

But seal my lips on my own aches and pains - they are increasing and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint - some of them are so hard to live with - but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil.

Make me thoughtful, but not moody; helpful, but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all - but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

(Author unknown)

Day 3

“They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Psalm 92 v14, 15).

We need to LISTEN to what old people SAY, and we should LOOK at (and imitate) what old people SHOW. And then thirdly:

- We need to LEARN from what old people SEE

Peter writes in Acts 2 v17 that *“your old men shall dream dreams”*. Old men (and women) can see things, suggest plans and outline projects on the basis of their communion with God, their wisdom and their many years of experience. Young people need to be sure not just to look at them and listen to them; but they need to learn from them, from their sense of vision and their insight – and the proposals they give based on them.

If you have the privilege of fellowship with older people be sure to look at them, listen to them and learn from them.

But there is one other truth about old people we need to remember:

- We need to REALIZE what they can DO

Their ministry is not finished. On the basis of the many years of experience and the wisdom they have amassed they can still be involved in the Lord's work – even if it is not as intensive and as busy as it was previously. They can still proclaim (as our verse for today tells us) the character and stability of God.

The Psalmist emphasizes all of this in our verse for today. Those who are old can still bring forth fruit. They can be fresh in their lives and ministries (and not just in their bodies). The NIV translates these two verses:

"They will still bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green proclaiming 'The Lord is upright; He is my Rock and there is no weakness in Him.' "

Some of your best and most efficient co-workers can be old people and there are many ministries in which they can become involved.

There have been many examples of how God has used older people in His work – and many examples of those who have even started a new and fruitful ministry in their old age:

- ✓ CT Studd had been a missionary in India and China, but his greatest and most lasting work started when he was almost 60 years old, when God called him to Africa and he founded and built up, in the 13 years which followed, the work of Worldwide Evangelistic Crusade.
- ✓ J. Irvin Overholtzer had been a pastor in California for years. But in his late fifties God laid a burden on his heart for children and he founded the ministry of Child Evangelism Fellowship – which was to become, by far, the largest mission to children in the world (and I have worked with this Mission for 57 years!).

Are you old? God has, I believe, still got a ministry for you – and it could well be your most fruitful ministry of all.

Day 4

"Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come" (Psalm 71 v18).

We have seen that the Bible gives much importance and great value to those later years of a believer's life. We continue to find biblical insight into this interesting subject.

A Biblical Prayer Concerning Old Age

David in Psalm 71 is an old and gray headed man and he recognizes the fact that he still has work to do for God, and so he prays the words of our verse for today. He was not as strong and healthy as he once was, but he now had much more experience and wisdom than he used to have. And as a result he wanted to teach and help his generation know more about God and his strength, on the basis of what he himself had learned down through the years. But, and this is very interesting, he writes that he also wants to teach the power of God to the future generation – and surely this means the children.

Older people can have a wonderful ministry to children – provided they are young in heart and able to identify with them. Don't rule them out. Don't think that all children's workers need to be young and vigorous. God has used many older people to lead many boys and girls to Jesus Christ.

There are many older people in the Bible whom God has used mightily in His service. Moses was already 80 years old when he started his life's ministry. Abraham was an old man when God called him to leave Ur and go to the Promised Land. And it was the elderly Simeon (Luke 2 v25) and the aged Anna (Luke 2 v36) who were the first to recognize the birth of the Messiah.

Are you acquainted with the poem by Longfellow on the subject of old age?

*"It is too late!" Ah, nothing is too late –
Cato learned Greek at eighty; Sophocles
wrote his grand "Oedipus", and Simonides
bore off the prize of verse from his compeers.
When each had numbered more than fourscore years;
And Theophrastus, at fourscore and ten,
Had begun his "Characters of Men".
Chaucer, at Woodstock, with his nightingales,
At sixty wrote the "Canterbury Tales".
Goethe, at Weimar, toiling to the last,
Completed "Faust" when eighty years were past.
What then? Shall we sit idly down and say,
"The night has come; it is no longer day?"
For age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress.
And as the evening twilight fades away,
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.*

Day 5

“Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said.” (Joshua 14 v12).

We have already seen some of what the Bible teaches about old age, and we have read and I trust echoed the biblical prayer by an old person which we read yesterday.

Our next step is to examine an example in the Bible of someone who was fruitful in his old age.

A Biblical Example of Fruitful Old Age

Caleb is a witness to the fact that some of life’s greatest achievements can take place in old age.

The children of Israel had entered the Promised Land. Caleb was 85 years old and he came to his friend Joshua (Joshua 14 v10), the leader of the children of Israel, and asked him if he could have the section of land which had been promised to him forty years previously.

“Give me this mountain,” he asked as we see in our verse for today. He knew that it would be the most difficult place in the whole land of Canaan to subdue and that it was a place with walled cities and giants. He wasn’t looking for a gift. He was asking for the opportunity to conquer and subdue the place. He was 85 years old, but he was still mentally sharp, physically strong and, above all, spiritually sound.

“As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in” (Joshua 14 v11).

And so, at a time of life when most men are written off, or who write themselves off, he embarked on a new adventure – and the greatest achievement of his life. Old age is a time when many good men grow soft muscled and soft hearted; a time when they retire not just from secular work, but also from the work of the Lord – but not Caleb. He purposed to win his greatest victory and achieve his greatest fruitfulness.

And he conquered the mountain (Joshua 15 v14), and by doing so he set us an example.

The father of the famous Bonar family in Scotland 200 years ago said to his three sons who were preachers, *“See that you run well to the end.”*

Sir Frances Drake said to the sailors under his command, "It's not the beginning of a voyage but in the completion of a voyage that the true glory lies."

One old man wrote his memoirs at the age of 92 and in them he spoke of the years after 70 as the happiest and most productive years of his life.

And this can be true of you also now if you are old – or when you become old.

Day 6

"Even to your old age, I am He, And even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isaiah 46 v4).

As we have examined the Bible's teaching on old age, we have seen the value it attributes to it, we have seen a prayer by an old person – and we have seen an example of an old person who started on a new and exciting ministry. There is one more teaching about old age in the Word of God – and I feel it is especially appropriate at this time.

God's Promises Concerning Old Age in the Bible

God is concerned for those of His children who are old and He gives them two special promises:

- HIS PROMISE for their personal lives

This promise is contained in our verse for today.

God's promise is to CARRY us and to DELIVER us.

Old people don't have the strength of those who are young, or the ability to endure long periods of hard work and activity. They are naturally and normally weak and even sometimes frail. But in this verse God promises to carry, strengthen, and deliver them in old age – when it is necessary.

This is a specific promise addressed to all of us older believers. And the application of that promise is – DON'T WORRY – God will look after us and carry us.

- HIS PROMISE for their service and ministry

We have seen this promise earlier in the week:

"They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing" (Psalm 92 v14).

God promises that if old people are planted, well established and stable *"in the house of the Lord"* (Psalm 92 v13) they *"will flourish"* – and they *"shall still bring forth fruit in old age."* God commits Himself to enable us to do this

(although we don't have the strength and ability ourselves) – and the result is contained in Psalm 92 verse 15. We old people will “*show that the Lord is upright; He is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in Him*” (Psalm 92 v15).

As we realize and appropriate His promise, we can understand God's concern and care for us, and the application is – DON'T BE WEARY.

So as a result of God's promises, older believers should not WORRY and should not be WEARY.

Old age is not a time to put ourselves on the shelf of retirement or to see it just as the opportunity to play golf, or go on cruises – or to sit and vegetate. Each period of our lives needs to be productive – and old age is no exception.

That is why every old person, or every person approaching that age, needs to ask God, “What do you want me to do now? How can I use my experience and wisdom best in your service?”

And God will bless you and use you and strengthen you.

Day 7

“Children's children are the crown of old men” (Proverbs 17 v6a).

There are many ministries available to older people. But one very vital and important ministry is to be grandparents to their grandchildren!

It is a great experience to be parents and have children; and it is a wonderful experience to be grandparents and have grandchildren.

The Blessings of Being Grandparents

Grandparents have many blessings and advantages:

- They have more free time to devote to their children than they had for their own children.
- They have now more experience with children than they had when they were parents and were learning how to “handle” their children.
- They have, or should have, more patience in dealing with them.
- They have less responsibility to carry with regard to the children. They can “love them and leave them”. Discipline is more the responsibility of the parents.
- A special bond and relationship can grow between grandparents and grandchildren and they can become especially close to each other.

Grandparents in the Bible

The Bible gives grandparents encouragement to be a help and blessing to their grandchildren in two ways:

- By showing a biblical example of a godly grandparent
Timothy owed much to the fact that he had a godly grandmother, Lois (2 Timothy 1 v5) who, along with his mother, taught him the Scriptures from his earliest days and helped him spiritually (2 Timothy 3 v15).
- By giving biblical promises to grandparents
The Bible contains several promises which are exclusively reserved for grandparents:
"Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father" (Proverbs 17 v6).
"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children!" (Psalm 103 v17).
"Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!" (Psalm 128 v6).

The Responsibilities of Grandparents

- They should love their grandchildren and want to help them and be involved with them as much as possible.
- They should understand the needs of their grandchildren – their spiritual needs and social needs (and sometimes physical or mental needs).
- They should pray for each of their grandchildren, by name, at least twice each day.
- They should enjoy them and minister to them:
 - ✓ By having them often in their homes.
 - ✓ By building a good relationship with them.
 - ✓ By listening to them and talking to them.
 - ✓ By playing games with them.
 - ✓ By telling them Bible stories and teaching them Bible truths.
 - ✓ By evangelizing them gently and with no pressure.
 - ✓ By helping them grow spiritually if they are saved.
- By being a good example to them.

We have greatly enjoyed our four grandchildren. And I trust that others will have the same experience and blessing with theirs.

Week 15: Theme – David, The Young Man I

Day 1

“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption” (Acts 13 v36).

I have always been fascinated by the life of David; and recently I have been sharing with my co-workers some thoughts and meditations on David’s early years. In one of my other books I have studied the life of David as a whole; but during the next two weeks I would like to concentrate on his early and exciting years – from which we can learn so much.

Today, as our introduction, we want to find one word which describes David (and his life) more than any other – and it is the word SERVANT.

- David, throughout his life, was primarily God’s servant. His first and all consuming purpose was to serve the God he loved:
 - ✓ God called him His servant *“My seroant David”* (Psalm 89 v3, 20).
 - ✓ People called him God’s servant – *“God chose David His seroant”* (Psalm 78 v70). *“Your seroant David”* (Acts 4 v25).
 - ✓ He called himself the servant of God many times (Psalm 19 v13; Psalm 143 v12).
- Because David was God’s servant and ready at all times to obey Him and do His will, David also was the servant of the people of God – as appointed and directed by God; and Paul describes this service in the words of today’s Bible verse. It was God’s will that he serve his own people, his own generation, the people he lived with and led – and he did so faithfully until the moment of his death.

We usually think of David as the warrior who defeated Goliath, or as the fugitive hounded by Saul or, especially as the greatest king Israel ever had; but I believe that God wants us primarily to see and remember him – as a SERVANT.

- God also wants us to be His servants or slaves (DOULOS) (Matthew 25 v21; 2 Timothy 2 v24) – to be obedient to Him at all times, to serve Him and to be under His control.
- And He wants us to serve people, especially our fellow believers (Matthew 20 v27; Galatians 5 v13). How can we serve others? Should we be under

their control and obedient to their commands? Yes and No! We serve others not by doing what they ask (although we should do that if they are placed in authority over us) – but by doing what they need. We obey their needs! Our attitude towards others must be one of service, with a desire to help them as much as we can. And in that sense we serve them and submit (Ephesians 5 v21) to them.

As we think of David we need to ask ourselves two questions:

- Are we serving God?
- Are we serving our own generation by the will of God?

Day 2

“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord” (Colossians 3 v20).

We cannot overestimate the importance of preparation for God's service and the value of “serving an apprenticeship” before taking any major step. The person who is faithful in little things will be given the opportunity to become involved in bigger things.

That is why it is so important to look at the early years, and first stages, of David's life and ministry – to see “how he got started”, and how God prepared him for all that lay ahead.

David The Faithful and Obedient Son

The faithfulness which David was to display later in his life had its birth in his childhood and teenage years; and his obedience and submission to his father were an early evidence of all that lay ahead. Service to God begins at home and if a person has not learned the value and necessity of parental obedience he will be of little value in the service of God. It is no coincidence that when Paul writes to the believers at Ephesus and Colosse, and when he addresses the believing children in those two churches, he commands them in the words of today's verse to obey their parents. Parental obedience is the basis of foundation of a life which obeys God. A child who has learned to obey his parents is more likely to obey God.

And so when Jesse, David's father, told him to do something he did it – and did it immediately.

- At an early age David had been given the task of looking after his father's sheep and he did what his father told him to do – and, as we will see tomorrow, he did it well.

David had seven brothers – all older than himself – and he could have demanded that some of them look after the sheep, but he didn't. He accepted the responsibility which he, as the youngest, was given and there is never any evidence of complaints or objections.

- When his father told him, a little later, to go to Saul (1 Samuel 16 v19 and 20) to play the harp to him and give him some peace and rest he obeyed immediately (1 Samuel 16 v21) even though it was a daunting task for a teenager.
- When his father told him to take provisions and food to his brothers who were in the Israelite army he did so immediately (1 Samuel 17 v17-20) even though there would have been a certain amount of danger in getting so close to the battle which was being fought. However he seemed to revel in this.
- Several years later when he was now a fugitive from Saul he was concerned for his father and mother and family, and was afraid Saul might harm them. So he moved them over into a place of safety in Moab (1 Samuel 22 v3).

In all these ways David showed faithfulness and obedience (and loving care) as a son. Is there a lesson here which we need to learn? And to teach to our children?

Day 3

“He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands” (Psalm 78 v70-72). Yesterday we saw the young David as a faithful and obedient son; and today we will see him as a faithful and conscientious shepherd.

David – The Conscientious Shepherd

David had been given a job to do which was not easy. It meant him being away from home and having to endure a degree of hardship and discomfort; and it also isolated him from other people – especially from other young people – but he did his job well:

- We read that he looked after the sheep (1 Samuel 16 v11). Just a few words – but this involved a lot of work, all day long, and much sacrifice.
- He also protected the sheep from the lions and bears which would attack and possibly devour them (1 Samuel 17 v34-35). This was a rather arduous responsibility for a teenager.

- He made sure that someone else looked after the sheep when he was asked by his father to do another task (1 Samuel 17 v20). Many young people would have seen this as a freedom from responsibility; but not David for he would never leave the sheep without a shepherd.

So David carried out his duties as a shepherd in an exemplary way. And it is so true that if someone is not willing to engage in what may seem menial work, he is not ready to be involved in more important work – with greater responsibility. But it is also true that these years as a shepherd were to prove the most profitable and most fruitful years of his life – and we can see many of the results in the Psalms, some of which he wrote at this time:

- During these years he came to appreciate the wonder and beauty of God's creation.
- He enjoyed the peace and quietness of solitude.
- He learned to play the harp.
- At some time during those early years he put his trust in God for salvation. *"For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth"* (Psalm 71 v5).
- He spent many hours in communion with God.
- He learned the necessity of putting his trust in God when faced with difficult situations – such as dealing with wild animals.
- He spent much time both singing and slinging! These years prepared him for the writing and fighting which lay ahead.
- His experiences with the leading and feeding of sheep were to help him in the leading and feeding of his people at a later date – as our verse for today tells us.

All of these were to stand him in good stead when he became the leader of his country. We need to ask ourselves if we are as conscientious as he was as we prepare for our ministry.

Day 4

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1 v27a).

We have seen David as an obedient son and as a conscientious shepherd. So the stage is now set for the next step in his young life – a gigantic and amazing step and experience which he would never have dreamed of.

David – Chosen by God

Saul had been a complete failure as king of Israel but God decided to remedy the situation:

- He looked for a man to replace Saul as king – the right kind of man (1 Samuel 13 v14).
- He “found” David. *“I have found My servant David; with My holy oil I have anointed him”* (Psalm 89 v20).

What a testimony for this young man David.

- He chose David to serve Him and be king and leader of Israel:
“He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds” (Psalm 78 v70).

- He sent Samuel to the home of Jesse to anoint David, one of his sons, as king.

But Samuel did not know which one to anoint. Samuel looked at Jesse’s seven sons one by one (1 Samuel 16 v6-10) and he thought each one as he appeared was the chosen one. He was using man’s standards and he failed. But God told him that He was not concerned with their outward appearances, but He *“looked on the heart”* (1 Samuel 16 v7b) and none of them measured up.

- And so Samuel asked if there was another son, and when he heard about the young David who was looking after the sheep, he asked for him to come. When David came, God told Samuel to anoint him as king – and he did so.

David was the last person anyone would have chosen. He was about 15 years old, a shepherd boy, simple and unsophisticated, disregarded and despised by everyone and not seen as important. But it was he whom God chose and whom Samuel anointed.

Does this not remind us of our verse for today, and isn’t the same principle still applicable today? Aren’t we thankful that God’s choice of us to be his servants is not based upon our abilities, wisdom and education?

- Samuel and David must both have understood what had happened - that David had been chosen as the next king of Israel. It is unlikely that his father and brothers realized this.

- The Holy Spirit came upon David, who was already regenerated through trust in God:

“Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah” (1 Samuel 16 v19).

- David returned to look after his sheep (1 Samuel 16 v9) but it would be another 14 years before he actually became king. So he had to be patient and get on with the job he had, menial though it seemed. He needed to “wait on the Lord” (Isaiah 40 v31). Are we willing to do the same?

Day 5

“The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21 v1).

David, the obedient son and the conscientious shepherd had now been appointed and anointed as the future king, and the Holy Spirit had come upon him in a special way. And the big question is – what will he do now? How will he react to the fact that God has chosen him and blessed him?

David Leaves Everything in God's Hands

David could have started to plan some way to take over from Saul; he could have started to manipulate people and circumstances so he could get on to the throne he had been promised. But he didn't. Instead he did two things:

- He went back to his job as a shepherd boy and it would seem that he continued in that role for at least two years (1 Samuel 16 v19).
- At the same time he left everything in God's Hands; he believed that God was in complete control and he waited for God to “bring things to pass” (Psalm 37 v5) which is exactly what He did!

A number of events now took place which were to bring that shepherd boy into the palace, and into the presence of King Saul – and start to prepare him for the time he would become king. David did not organize or manipulate any of those steps because God was in control – and everything including the king's heart (as our Bible verse reminds us) was in the hands of the Lord.

- First of all Saul was greatly troubled (1 Samuel 16 v14).
- His servants recommended that someone who was a gifted player of the harp should come and play for him – so he would feel better.
- Saul asked them to find such a person.
- One of his servants said that he knew the person – a son of Jesse called David! It is interesting to hear how he described him:
 - ✓ A good player of the harp. ✓ A brave and courageous man.
 - ✓ A warrior. ✓ Speaks well and wisely
 - ✓ Good looking. ✓ Above all – the Lord is with him.

That's quite a testimony, isn't it?

- Saul sent to Jesse and asked him to send David to the palace, which he did.
- David entered Saul's service. Saul loved him, and he became Saul's armourbearer and harp player.
- Saul asked him to stay – and he did so for perhaps two years.

In this way David was introduced to a new way of life, and he started to adjust to it, even though he had just been a shepherd boy. It was a big move and change for him but a big step forward in God's plan for him.

But this was not because he organized it; it was because God was in control – and directed the circumstances. The king's heart was truly in the Lord's hand. Can you and I not learn to trust Him – and never try to manipulate people or circumstances?

Day 6

"I said, 'I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue'" (Psalm 39 v1a).

And so, as we saw yesterday, God controlled the circumstances in David's teenage years, and he found himself in the royal palace serving King Saul for two years, as his servant, armourbearer and musician.

David Displays His Character

But we read in 1 Samuel 17 v15 that David returned from the palace to continue shepherding his father's sheep. The Bible doesn't say why he did so. Perhaps Saul had become so occupied with his war with the Philistines (1 Samuel 17 v6) that he had no need for a musician.

David was now around 17 years old. But God was not finished with him and his circumstances. God was still in control.

A short time afterwards – probably several weeks later – David's father asked him to go to his three brothers (who were in the Israelite army) to give them, and their captain a supply of food (1 Samuel 17 v18). It seemed a relatively trivial and unimportant event but it was to be another life changing event for David. First of all there had been his anointing; then his time in the palace; and now his visit to the Israelite army which was going to result in his battle with Goliath. But, in this event and what happened soon afterwards, we can see four fascinating facets of David's character and we can apply them to our own lives:

- He obeyed his father (1 Samuel 17 v20) in a relatively menial task. (Are we ready to do relatively unimportant tasks in God's service?).
- He did not neglect his sheep (1 Samuel 17 v20). He himself got someone else to look after them.

(Are we careful not to neglect present responsibilities when another opportunity arises?).

- He was concerned with the honour of God when he arrived at the battlefield (1 Samuel 17 v26) and saw how the Philistines were mocking God's people and God – without any reaction from the Israelites. They saw the situation from their viewpoint and the result was – FEAR. David saw the situation from God's viewpoint and the result was – FAITH.

(How do we react to a problem situation? With fear or with faith? Whose viewpoint do we have?)

- He was criticized (1 Samuel 17 v28). When he voiced his dismay and disappointment that the Israelites should allow this to happen – and not do something about it, he was criticized very strongly, especially by his brother who accused him of neglecting his sheep, of being proud and just wanting to see the battle. But we need to see how he reacted to criticism because how a person reacts is a true reflection of his character.

He did not quarrel, argue or try to explain. He was putting into practice the words he wrote in our verse for today. He simply asked two questions:

- ✓ What have I done?
- ✓ Is there not a cause?

(Can these four characteristics be seen in our lives - especially the fourth one?)

Day 7

“David said, “The LORD, Who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” (1 Samuel 17 v37a).

Our next step in our studies in the life of the young David comes to the event which was to prove a major turning point in his life.

David and Goliath

We all know the story in 1 Samuel 17 – the giant (representing the Philistines), the fear of the Israelites, and then the arrival of young David (verse 20). He volunteered to fight the giant Goliath (verse 32), he refused Saul's armour (verse 39), he approached the giant with his staff, his sling and his five stones (verse 40) and he killed Goliath (verse 49). We know the story well and love it.

Let's ask David some questions:

- WHO is ready to fight the giant? - I am (verse 32)

- WHAT are you going to do? - Kill him (verse 36)
- WHERE? - Here
- WHEN? - Now.
- WHY? - Because God's honour has been offended (verse 36)
- HOW? - By God's power (verse 37).

Looking at the story again we can see three sets of TWOS.

- TWO viewpoints with regard to the problem of the giant. Everyone saw the same situation and the same problem – but in two different ways:
 - ✓ Everybody, except one youth, saw the Philistine **as too big to kill**. They left God out of it. They saw themselves and their weakness; but did not see God and His power.
 - ✓ One youth, David saw the Philistine **as too big to miss**. He looked at the problem and situation from God's viewpoint and believed that He would give the victory as we can see in today's verse.

The problem was not Goliath. The problem was the hearts of the Israelites and especially their leader.

Every time you face a problem there will also be two viewpoints. Be sure to choose the right one – David's (and God's) viewpoint.

- TWO reactions by David to the problem of the giant:
 - ✓ He did some **remembering** (verse 34, 35). He remembered his confrontations with the lion and bear – and how he had defeated them.
 - ✓ He did some **reasoning** (verse 37). "If God delivered me from them He can do the same again in this situation."

And you also need to remember and reason as David did when faced with a problem.

- TWO reasons for David's success and victory over the giant:
 - ✓ He used the skill he had perfected with his sling during his years as a shepherd. And God expects us to do what we can when faced with a problem.
 - ✓ He trusted the power of God to give the victory (verse 37) and God made sure that the stone hit its target and killed the giant. And so, having done what we can do to solve a difficult situation, we can trust God to do what we cannot do.

Week 16:

Theme – David The Young Man II

Day 1

“ and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel”
(1 Samuel 15 v26b).

We continue this week with our studies of David in his earlier years.

In 1 Samuel chapter 17 we saw three leaders:

- Goliath – the **fleshly** leader - bold, noisy and self-confident.
- Saul – the **fearful** leader - afraid of the problem and unwilling to solve it.
- David – the **faithful** leader - ready to go forward and solve the problem.

Which of these three groups do you and I fit into?

David and Saul

It would be interesting at this point to compare and contrast these two men.

- There were some **SIMILARITIES** between them:
 - ✓ Both were chosen by God for leadership (1 Samuel 9 v16, 10 v1)
 - ✓ Both were anointed by the Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 10 v10).
 - ✓ Both looked well and had many abilities (1 Samuel 9 v2; 10 v24).
 - ✓ Both were warriors (1 Samuel 11 v11).
 - ✓ Both began their ministry well (1 Samuel 11 v12).
- But there were many **DIFFERENCES** between them:
 - ✓ We have already seen in David at least three outstanding qualities:
 - Complete **CONFIDENCE** in God (Saul completely lacked that).
 - A deep **CONCERN** for God's glory (Unlike Saul).
 - A wise **COMBINATION** of skill and trust (Saul may have had the skills but he didn't have the trust).
 - ✓ When we look at Saul we see three serious problems:
 - He was **CONSUMED** by jealousy (1 Samuel 18 v8). David was never guilty of this.
 - He was **CONTROLLED** by bitterness (1 Samuel 18 v8). David was so different.
 - He was disobedient to God's **COMMAND** (1 Samuel 13 v13). David's life generally was a life of obedience.
- And then there were **CONSEQUENCES**:

- ✓ David's life and ministry were blessed by God (1 Samuel 16 v18) and he was greatly used by God and, although he made mistakes, some of them serious, his life continued and ended in triumph.
- ✓ Saul's life and ministry ended in tragedy:
 - He was rejected by God as we see in today's verse.
 - God left him (1 Samuel 18 v12).

We see in Saul a man with great ability and potential who turned his back on God and reaped the results. And we need to be sure that we follow in David's footsteps - not Saul's.

Day 2

"Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18 v1).

When David defeated Goliath he was taken into the palace by King Saul, put in a position of great favour and honour (1 Samuel 18 v2) and was appointed as army commander. The future for David, now 19 years old, looked bright and promising. But that was soon to change, and David would become a fugitive for the next eleven years.

David and Jonathan

But before these fugitive years began, with all the problems they would bring, God did something for David which would help him through those years. He gave David a very special friend. That friend's name was Jonathan. Our verse for today shows the beginning of a wonderful friendship between these two men. They made a covenant and their hearts were knit together from that day onwards:

- Let us think first of all about David:
 - ✓ He was young – probably about 19 years old.
 - ✓ He was a shepherd boy and very inexperienced in many ways.
 - ✓ For the past two years he had been living a new and strange life in the palace culture.
 - ✓ He knew he would be king one day.
 - ✓ He was rather bewildered by all that was happening – and so quickly.
- And then we think about Jonathan:
 - ✓ He was a mature, cultured, man of great ability and experience.
 - ✓ He was sophisticated, popular and a brave warrior (1 Samuel 14 v6-14).

- ✓ He was the obvious successor to his father as king.
- And then we think of their friendship:
 - ✓ There were a few similarities between the two men – they were both brave warriors and men of integrity.
 - ✓ But there were many differences in their background, their sophistication, their culture and their way of life.
 - ✓ There was a considerable age difference. David was 19 years old ; and it can be calculated that Jonathan was probably around 50 years old! (see 1 Samuel 13 and 14).
 - ✓ Jonathan came to understand that David would be the next king and David already knew that he would be.
 - ✓ Jonathan's father Saul objected to this friendship.

There could have been problems which would have upset this friendship and made it impossible to continue. But this friendship continued, and deepened and was to play a major part in David's life in the years which lay ahead.

Having a special friend can make all the difference especially when problems come. Do you have a special friend? If not, ask God to give you one.

Day 3

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor" (Ecclesiastes 4 v9).

God gave David a friend and this friendship was to play a big part in David's life over the difficult years which followed.

Friends

You and I need friends also. I believe there are three kinds of friends:

- Those who are just friends. We usually have a good number of these with whom we can be friendly and enjoy their company.
- Those who are special friends. We don't usually have many of these – because these are friends we can share things with and from whom we can get advice and help.
- Those who are very special friends – just as David and Jonathan were. These are outside your family circle – and the same sex as yourself. There is a very strong bond between very special friends – and they can share anything with each other. Usually we just have one (or perhaps two) very special friends. Close relationships like this are rare – but if you have a

very special friend be thankful for him/her and the blessing you can be to each other.

The Blessings of Friendship

The Bible tells us a lot about friendship and its importance. One of the main passages is Ecclesiastes 4 verses 9 – 12. In these verses we have an outline of the blessings received from friendship:

- A friend helps us in our WORK – as we see in our verse for today
Two people together can do more in many types of work than two people working separately – and that is especially true in the Lord’s work. That is why the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples “two by two” (Mark 6 v7) – so they could help each other.
- A friend helps us in our WALK
“For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up” (Ecclesiastes 4 v10).
There are times when we slip and fall – and find it difficult to pick ourselves up again. What a help it is to have a friend come alongside, help us to our feet again and encourage us to get going once more. We will see later how Jonathan helped David in his walk enabling him to get through, and overcome, difficulties and discouragements.
- A friend helps to give us WARMTH
“Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?” (Ecclesiastes 4 v11).
This verse is a rather quaint way of explaining how a person can warm up his friend who is socially and spiritually cold, alone and isolated, and infuse new life and heart into his life and ministry.
- A friend helps us in our WEAKNESS
“Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastics 4 v12).
When the battle is fierce and the enemy strong, a friend can help us resist and stand firm – and if there are two friends that is even better.

If you don’t have a very special friend, ask God to give you one. He/she will be a great help and blessing to you and your ministry.

Day 4

"A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (Proverbs 18 v24a). As we have seen the friendship between Jonathan and David, we have realized how important it is for each of us to have at least one special friend; and the Bible tells us that a friend can help us in our WORK, in our WALK, give us WARMTH, and strengthen us in our WEAKNESS. In the book of Proverbs we also see how friends can help each other.

Friends Help Each Other

Solomon outlines five ways friends can help each other:

- Friends love each other at all times.
"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17 v17).
The basis of a very special friendship between two men – or two women – is a pure love, as there was between David and Jonathan – a love obviously without any kind of sexual connotation and without any ulterior motive. And it is a love which continues in all circumstances and through all difficulties.
- Friends stay close to each other, encourage each other, and stand together in times of difficulty.
"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18 v24b).
There are times when the ties of friendship are stronger than family ties to a brother or sister. Someone has said that we can choose our friends – but we cannot choose our family members!
- Friends correct each other when correction is needed:
"Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27 v6a).
There are times when we make mistakes – and we need to have someone who will not only see those mistakes, but who will tell us about them and confront us with what we have done. This will, of course, hurt us like a wound, but we need such correction and a friend displays his faithfulness by giving us that correction.
- Friends advise us:
"Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel" (Proverbs 27 v9).
We have many decisions to make in our life and ministry for which we often need advice and help. And when we ask our friends for counsel and advice it can be a great help to us. Their advice can be sweet and fragrant and give us much joy.

- Friends “sharpen” us and bring out the best in us:

“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27 v17).

If we want to sharpen a blunt knife we can use another piece of metal to rub against it and bring back its sharpness. And friends can stimulate each other by talking together, planning and discussing together, and by working together.

Do you have a friend who can help you in any, or all, of the above ways? Do you know how to have friends? Our verse for today tells you – be friendly!

Day 5

“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women” (2 Samuel 1 v26).

One of the best examples of friendship in the Bible is the close and special friendship between David and Jonathan. God gave David this very special friend at a critical moment in his life. David would soon be a fugitive for the eleven years which were to follow, and Jonathan was going to be a source of great strength and encouragement in those future and difficult years.

Today we have a brief outline of how that friendship developed:

- 1 Samuel 18 v1-4. We have already seen the start of this friendship in those wonderful four verses.
- 1 Samuel 18. In the rest of this chapter we can see the growing jealousy and hatred in Saul’s heart towards David – and a number of attempts on David’s life – despite all the wonderful efforts of David.
- 1 Samuel 19. Saul now asked Jonathan to kill David (verse 1); but Jonathan first of all warned his friend about his father’s command (verse 2). He then reasoned with his father and spoke so highly of David that Saul agreed not to kill David (verse 6) and he was restored in the palace (verse 7). But after another military success for David, Saul tried twice to kill him again (verse 10 and verse 11). David escaped both times.
- 1 Samuel 20. David speaks to his friend Jonathan and asked what he had done to deserve all of this (verse 1). Jonathan encourages him by assuring him that he will not die (verse 2) – and he offered to do all he could to help David (verse 4). David asked him to find out definitely what his father’s plan was concerning him – and Jonathan assured him he would (verse 13). Jonathan went to his father to speak to him about David and defend him (verse 32) – but his father even tried to kill him (verse 33). And Jonathan

knew now that his father wanted to kill David and would not change his mind. So he informed David (verses 35-40) and advised him to flee (verse 42).

But notice in this chapter two wonderful "interludes" which exemplified their friendship:

- ✓ Verses 14-17. Jonathan and David renewed the covenant they had made in 1 Samuel 18 v1-4 – and once more expressed the love they had for each other.
- ✓ Verses 41, 42. They kissed each other, wept together and renewed their vows and assured each other that God would be with both of them and their families – and then they separated.
- 1 Samuel 23 v16-18. They only met once again. David was now a fugitive and Saul was trying to kill him. And just at the right time Jonathan came to encourage and strengthen David, and tell him he would not die – but become the next king. They renewed their covenant once again and then separated for the last time.

How wonderful it was for David to have a friend like this, and when Jonathan was killed by the Philistines David eulogized his friend with the words of our verse for today.

Day 6

"A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones" (Proverbs 14 v30).

The problems which David faced were due completely to one man – Saul the king of Israel. Why did Saul hate David and want to kill him? What was his problem? Saul's main and basic problem was JEALOUSY.

The Causes of Saul's Jealousy

This jealousy was based upon several factors:

- He was jealous of David's success in warfare (1 Samuel 18 v6, 7). The people were praising David's skill as a soldier and leader rather than his. And underlying this was probably a sense of guilt that he, as the king, should have been the one to fight and defeat Goliath – and not this teenager.
- He was jealous because all the people loved David – he had taken the place in their affections that Saul once occupied.
- He was jealous because he became more and more aware that God had chosen David to be the king of Israel instead of him. *"What more can he have*

but the kingdom" (1 Samuel 18 v8b). And he expressed this fear (and jealousy) to his son, Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20 v31.

The Results of Saul's Jealousy

Saul's jealousy led him in four ways:

- He became **angry** with David (1 Samuel 18 v8a).
- He became **suspicious** of David and his motives (1 Samuel 18 v8a and 9).
- His **fear** of David grew (1 Samuel 18 v12, 15).
- Eventually all of these resulted in action and **aggression**:
 - ✓ He tried to kill him with a javelin – twice.
 - ✓ He subtly appointed him twice to a military command which he hoped would result in his death.
 - ✓ He made promises he didn't keep.
 - ✓ He told his servants and Jonathan to kill David (1 Samuel 19 v1).

Jealousy is "a green eyed monster" which devours everything it comes to. You can see the results in Saul's sad and tragic life. But it could also have sad results in our lives if we allow it to enter and grow.

God's command in Exodus 20 v17 that we should not covet or be jealous still stands. In the New Testament we read:

"Love does not envy" (1 Corinthians 13 v4).

"Let us not envy one another" (Galatians 5 v26).

It is even possible for Christian workers to be jealous of other Christian workers, of their gifts and abilities, of their success or of their financial support.

But we need to remember the words of today's verse – and understand what envy can do for us.

Day 7

"And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'" (Acts 13 v22b).

Today's devotional is the last in our series on the youthful years of David and we should examine David's reactions to all that has happened to him, and especially to the jealousy, and hatred of Saul and his attempts to kill him.

In 1 Samuel 18 we can see five clear and positive reactions:

- Verse 5. **He reacted obediently**
"And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him."

He knew the danger involved; and he must have understood what Saul was trying to do – and yet he obeyed and did so implicitly and completely.

➤ Verses 7, 17, 27. **He reacted bravely**

His reputation as a soldier and as a commander grew. Before long the people were praising his prowess – and crying that he had “*slain his ten thousands*”. And when Saul offered David his daughter in marriage if he would kill one hundred Philistines, he and his men went out and slew two hundred.

➤ Verse 5, 14 **He reacted wisely**

In these two verses David is described as “*behaving himself wisely*” (verse 5) and “*behaved himself very wisely*” (verse 14). He was still young in years, but displayed remarkable maturity and wisdom. He could have objected to what had happened; he could have said that one day he would be king, or he could have boasted in his defeat over Goliath, or in his continuing success as a soldier. But he watched his words and his actions carefully – and kept himself under wise control.

➤ Verse 18, 23 – **He reacted humbly**

When he was offered the possibility of marrying one of the king's daughters he said in both these verses that he was not worthy of such a privilege. “*I'm only a poor man and of little honour*” (verse 23). This was not false humility or modesty. It was the genuine reaction of a young man who was truly humble.

➤ Verses 12, 14 – **He reacted spiritually**

In verse 12 we read that Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him. And verse 14 tells us, “*And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the LORD was with him.*”

This fifth quality, characteristic and reaction was the basis of all the other four qualities and reactions. The reason he was obedient, brave, wise and humble was because he was spiritual – the Lord was with Him; and it was the Lord Who enabled him to be the person he was and to react the way he did. He was indeed, as our verse for today says, a man after God's own heart and one who fulfilled His will. And it was God Who protected him and kept him safe from all the evil and harm which Saul wanted to inflict on him.

What a wonderful example for us to follow. We could well ask ourselves the questions – am I obedient, brave, wise and humble? And, above all, am I spiritual? Can others see that the Lord is with me?

Week 17:

Theme – David The Fugitive

Day 1

“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3 v9).

David’s life can be easily divided into three parts or sections:

- David the youth - and we have already studied those first 18 years of his life.
- David the fugitive - and we will study these eleven years this week.
- David the king – the remaining years of his life.

Through no fault of his own David was now a fugitive, and for the next eleven years he was pursued by Saul whose goal was to kill him as he moved from place to place he was in perpetual danger.

As we look at these fugitive years we will see a series of “UPS” and “DOWNS”. There were times when David was very close to his Lord and living a godly life; but there were also times when he was far away from his Lord and doing things which were contrary to God’s will for him. And, much as we have enjoyed our meditations last week on the wonderful years of David’s youth, we need to realize that David was a sinner just like you and me.

And one of the very first episodes in David’s life as a fugitive show us the sinfulness of which he was capable – a real “DOWN”. On three separate occasions we see David telling lies and also trying to deceive people:

- Actually the first instance recorded of David lying took place before he became a fugitive. In 1 Samuel 20 v6 David asked Jonathan to tell his father that he could not be present at the table because he had to go to Bethlehem to make a sacrifice there. This was not true (1 Samuel 20 v24); and David was asking Jonathan to tell a lie; which he did (1 Samuel 20 v29). And it would seem from Saul’s reaction in the following verse that he did not believe the excuse that David gave..
- But worse was to come. David had now fled to Nob where the house of God was. Abimelech the priest asked him why he had come, and David replied that King Saul had sent him on a secret mission (1 Samuel 21 v2). That also was a lie. David then asked for five loaves of the hallowed bread for him and his men and it would seem that, in response to the priests’

questions, he was rather “economical with the truth”. Then David asked if he could have a spear or sword – and he said that he didn’t have one with him because “*the king’s business*” had to be done quickly (1 Samuel 21 v8). That was another lie because he was not on the king’s business.

- And yet still worse was to follow. David was so frightened of what Saul would do to him that he fled to Gath, the country of the Philistines, his old enemies and the enemies of his people. To protect himself he pretended to be mad (1 Samuel 21 v13) and cleverly deceived the Philistines by not only telling a lie – but by living a lie.

How sad it is to see David lying and deceiving like this. This should act as a warning and remind us how important it is, as our verse for today tells us, not to lie – but always to tell the truth – especially when you see the later results of David’s lying as recorded in 1 Samuel 22 verses 11-19.

Day 2

“Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD” (Psalm 34 v11).

As we saw yesterday, it is difficult to understand and explain why this fine young man David lied and deceived. Perhaps it was because of his immaturity. Perhaps it was because he was pragmatic and felt that it was necessary and permissible to tell such lies to protect himself. But it is more likely these lies were just the result of the sinful nature which was within him – a sinful nature which is present in the best of people, and also in us – and it shows itself in various ways.

But brighter and better days lay ahead – and the “DOWN” of yesterday was followed by the “UP” or several “UPS” of today:

- First of all we read that David wrote Psalm 56 in Gath during the time he was there, and in it he expresses his fear of his enemies (verses 1-2,5-9) and he states his faith in God (v3-6, 10-13). Then he wrote Psalm 34 after he left Gath and declares his deliverance by God (verses 4-7), his thanks to God (verses 1-3) and encourages others (especially the children, as we see in today’s verse) to learn the lessons he has learned (verse 11 onwards). So these psalms indicate that in the middle of his sin and deception David not only clung to his faith in God but he learned lessons from his experience.
- Then in 1 Samuel 22 v1 David flees to the cave Adullam and it is interesting to see how he attracted 400 men to COME to HIM, LIVE with HIM AND SERVE under HIM. Does this not remind us of our own experience when

we CAME to One greater than David, and that we are LIVING with Him and SERVING under Him. (Compare Mark 3 v13 and 14). And David here displays the first sign of his ability to attract others to serve under him and of his leadership abilities. Its interesting that the three groups who came were distressed, or debtors, or discouraged (Can we also see here a picture of ourselves when we came to the One greater than David?).

- And one of the first things David did was to show his care and love for his family and ensure that they were safe from the hands of Saul. That was another “UP”. He took them to the neighbouring country of Moab and asked the king of that land to protect them (1 Samuel 22 v3 and 4).
- In the next verse (1 Samuel 22 v5) we see how David responded to the voice of God through the prophet Gad. When God told him to leave Moab, which was safe and where he was with his family, and return to Judah where Saul and danger were, he obeyed immediately. And that was a real “UP”
- There is still another “UP” in this chapter (1 Samuel 22). David heard in verse 21 about the consequences of his visit to Nob and his lies. A man Doeg who was there reported everything to Saul and as a result 85 of the priests were killed by Doeg on the command of Saul and all who lived in the city of Nob. What a tragedy!
But two little chinks of light shine through the darkness of that episode:
 - ✓ David took the responsibility for what happened and did not try to blame someone else.
 - ✓ He took the one surviving priest, Abiathar, under his protection from that day onwards, and promised he would be a help and blessing to him.

Our prayer is that God would enable us to have more and more “UPS” in our lives.

Day 3

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men” (Romans 12 v17).

When we read 1 Samuel 25 we find the fugitive David in another DOWN. Samuel died in verse 1, and it would be a further five years before David became king. David needed food for his 600 men who were continually on the move as fugitives – and were unable to settle down and produce their own food. So they probably had agreements with the farmers in Southern Judea to

protect them from their many enemies. These farmers would then give them food.

There are three main people in the story contained in this chapter:

- NABAL was one of the rich farmers in Southern Judea whose flocks and herds were protected by David and his men.

David sent ten of his men to Nabal to ask him for food and provision in return for their help and protection, and, when they came, they reminded Nabal of how they had protected his servants and animals (verse 16).

But Nabal refused to give them what they asked for. And not only that; he insulted them and David. "Who is he? What right does he have to get anything? He is a rebel! I will not give him anything. I will keep everything I have."

- DAVID waited for his 10 men to return. When they came back they gave him a report concerning Nabal and his response to their request.

David reacted quickly and lost his temper. He called all his men together, commanded them to get their swords – and told them they were going to kill Nabal and all his men. "Let's go and kill them," he said (verses 13, 21, 22).

Here was a man who had often been so disciplined and restrained when facing danger and temptation in much bigger issues (especially when opposed by King Saul) but now he lost his temper over a relatively minor matter. He was going to kill a number of people (most of whom had nothing to do with Nabal's response).

We need to learn from this "DOWN" in David's life how important it is not to lose our tempers when things go against us, and when people say or do things to us we don't like. Our verse for today tells us not "*to repay evil for evil.*" If someone hurts us we should not try to hurt them in return. We should leave the matter in God's Hands.

- ABIGAIL was Nabal's wife. When she heard what had happened she assembled all the provisions David needed (without her husband knowing what she was doing) and went out to meet David.

When she met him she spoke to him at some length (I understand that her "speech" to David is the longest given by any woman in the Bible). She asked David for forgiveness and pleaded with him not to carry out what he had planned. She knew that David had restrained himself in the past and encouraged him to do so again. And she told him that, one day, he would be glad that he did so.

David's anger and temper were melted and he did not go ahead with his plans. Incidentally, it is interesting to read that Nabal had a heart attack

when he heard about his wife's generosity and died ten days later – as a “judgment of God” (Later on David married Abigail).

Doesn't this teach us to leave all these matters in God's Hands – and not to try to get our own back?

If a house is on fire, is it better to put the fire out – or prevent it from starting in the first place?

Day 4

“And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers” (Deuteronomy 6 v18).

Yesterday in 1 Samuel 25 we saw David in one of his “DOWNS”, and it was only when a woman interceded that he restrained himself from a wrong and bloodthirsty act. Today we come to two of his “UPS” which were quite similar. Saul is pursuing David with 3,000 of his men – and his definite purpose and all consuming passion is to kill him. David and his men are hiding inside a large cave (1 Samuel 24 v3). Saul and his men approached the cave, and went into it not realizing that David and his men were inside. Saul must have lain down and gone to sleep. David and his men watched with bated breath and in complete silence in the dark depths of the cave. Then David's men said to him, “This is your chance. God has delivered him into your hands, kill him!”. David faced a choice. Should he kill Saul or not? If he killed him he would become king, he and his family would be safe and able to return home. David could bring healing to the land which Saul had been troubling, and, of course, he was under pressure from his men to do so.

But David decided not to kill him. He only cut off part of his cloak. Why did he not kill him? Perhaps David had still in the back of his mind the hope of reconciliation. But his main reason was because he was a man of principle. He knew that it would be wrong to do so. Saul was God's anointed king, despite everything (1 Samuel 24 v6) – and David also knew that murder was a sin.

Our verse for today tells us that God wants us to do what is good and right in His sight. Our actions are not to be governed by circumstances. We must not be pragmatic and only do those things which give the best results. We are to do what is right according to God's Word – no matter what the outcome may be. We are to be men and women of principle, and David was such a man. And I am sure that even though his men put him under pressure to kill Saul they respected

his principles, and in later years many would remember this episode in David's life.

It is interesting to see that David was so sensitive and tender, and was convicted even about cutting off part of Saul's cloak.

When Saul learned that David had spared his life he offered friendship and reconciliation to David – but it was short lived.

Soon after that, in 1 Samuel 26, almost the same thing happened. David and Abishai crept into the camp of Saul and his men. They came to the sleeping Saul, and this time Abishai wanted to kill Saul. This might have been a greater temptation than the last time, because David himself would not be responsible for Saul's death. But David again said, "No! He is the Lord's anointed and I will let the Lord look after him" (1 Samuel 26 v10, 11).

Well done, David! You have shown yourself to be a man of principle. And may this be true for you and me today – that we will always do that which is "*right and good in the Lord's sight*." (Deuteronomy 6 v18).

Day 5

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"
(1 Corinthians 10 v12).

Eight years have gone by since David became a fugitive. There seems no solution to his problem. When he had spared Saul's life on two occasions Saul had expressed his thankfulness and promised reconciliation with David – but had almost immediately returned to his hostility towards him, and his desire to kill him. Saul was now hunting him again and trying to kill him. David is tired, discouraged and depressed and cannot find enough food for his growing band of men. "I am going to be killed", he said (1 Samuel 27 v1). "There is only one place I can be safe". And he and his men went into Philistia, hired themselves out to their sworn enemies and stayed there for sixteen months.

It all seems unbelievable. David the conqueror of the Philistines had now sold himself out to them and become their friend and ally. These sixteen months must have been one of the darkest and deepest "DOWNS" of David's life – especially because it was his own fault and the result of his own decision. David and his men prospered, and were safe and at peace – but at what a price!

- Truth was the first casualty. David and his men prospered by raiding the other enemies of Israel (1 Samuel 27 v8) – who were friends of the Philistines – and they then told the Philistines they had raided the Israelites (1 Samuel 27 v10). This was a lie – and they were living it.

- Respect for life was the next casualty. To keep his secret everyone had to be killed on their raiding expeditions (1 Samuel 27 v11) – including the women and children.
- Trust was betrayed. The king of the Philistines trusted David and believed him when others criticized him (1 Samuel 27 v6, 12; 29 v6, 9). He accepted what he thought was David's loyalty. But that loyalty was a fake.

How tragic it is to see a believer in such a position – lying, killing and deceiving. David was now a complete backslider. Just think of the damage caused when someone who has been saved and blessed by God lowers his standards before the unsaved. This was the man who was so concerned about the glory of God that he fought and defeated the Philistine giant Goliath. His desire there was to glorify God; but his present actions were doing the opposite.

Yes, David and his men had prospered. But no psalms were written during these sixteen months; and there was no desire to listen to God or seek God's will. David was a backslider; he had chosen the way of the world and soon he would be disowned by them also.

Let us be careful not to follow in David's steps during these dark sixteen months. We must never sacrifice principles to obtain prospects and peace. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10 v6 that these stories from the Old Testament are examples for us to follow or avoid – and warns us in our verse for today “to be sure we don't fall like some of those did” – including David.

But worse was to follow – and we will see that tomorrow.

Day 6

“But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God” (1 Samuel 30 v6b).

Achish, the Philistine king, assembled his armies to fight Israel (1 Samuel 28 v1; and 29 v1). And he innocently asked David and his men to be part of his army and fight their own people. And, believe it or not, David agreed and they all joined the Philistine army – and he would, in all probability, have gone with them to fight his own people. Lies and deceit can lead to all kinds of difficult and tragic results.

However, fortunately for David and his men, the other Philistine leaders did not trust David (like the naïve Achish did) – and wouldn't allow David and his men to join their army (1 Samuel 29 v4). So Achish sent David and his men back to Ziklag, the city where they were living since they came into Philistia.

But when they returned to Ziklag a disaster awaited them. In their absence the Amalekites had attacked and burned the city and taken captive all their women and children – including David's two wives.

David and his men wept bitterly (1 Samuel 30 v4). They were now reaping their harvest of lies and duplicity. David himself was greatly distressed (1 Samuel 30 v6) and especially so when his men threatened to stone him because they blamed him for all that had happened.

This must have been one of the lowest points and deepest "DOWNS" in his whole life. His loved ones had been taken away; his men were about to stone him; and he saw himself as a complete failure and the victim of his own backsliding.

Have you ever been in a position like this – blaming yourself for what you had done, and seeing yourself as a failure?

What should you do?

What did David do? Did he blame others? No! Did he quit? No! The Bible tells us in our verse for today that he "*strengthened himself* or encouraged himself *in the Lord his God.*"

What did that mean? He turned his thoughts to God; he sought God; he spoke to Him; he listened to Him; he focused on Him. And God graciously drew near and blessed him.

In the very next verse David spoke to God through the priest Abiathar and asked Him if he should pursue the Amalekites. This seems to be the first time in many months he had spoken to God and asked Him what he should do. God graciously answered him and told him to do so (1 Samuel 30 v17, 18). David and his men conquered the Amalekites and recovered all the property they had taken and rescued their loved ones.

The sun had risen on David's life again. The darkness was gone and there was a new dawn. David was on his way back and in the not too distant future his fugitive years would end and he would become king of Judah and then of all Israel. But that is another story.

Day 7

"So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands" (Psalm 78 v72).

David is now 30 years old – and will soon become king. But as we look back over those 30 years as a child, as a youth and as a fugitive there are two wonderful facts which stand out:

➤ DAVID WAS LOVED BY MEN

David, despite the weakness which sometimes emerged, was a very attractive person. We often use the word “attractive” to describe someone who is beautiful or handsome in appearance. But that is not what it means. The word “attractive” comes from two Latin words – “tracto” which mean “to pull” (we get the word “tractor” from it) and the word “ad” which means “towards”. An attractive person is a person who “pulls people towards him”. And David was truly an attractive person who was greatly loved – and pulled people towards him.

- ✓ Earlier in his life we are told that Saul loved him very much (1 Samuel 16 v21), before he saw David as a threat to him and his throne.
- ✓ Jonathan loved David “*as his own soul*” (1 Samuel 18 v1). As soon as he met David he was attracted to him.
- ✓ When David went to the cave Adullam four hundred men were attracted to him and he became their leader (1 Samuel 22 v1, 2).
- ✓ It is later recorded (2 Samuel 23 v15-17) that when he was in the cave David longed for a drink of water from the well at Bethlehem – and three of his men broke through the Philistine ranks and brought him some water to drink. Why? Because they loved him so much. And David, in turn, loved them so much that he felt he could not drink the water because of the danger which had been involved in getting it.

David was greatly loved – especially by his men during his fugitive years and then by his people when he became king and ruled over them. And our verse for today gives the reasons why they loved him – he fed them, and he led them; and they saw and appreciated both his integrity and skillfulness.

If you and I are going to be effective children’s workers we need to be attractive people. If we love the children and seek to help them; if we are people of integrity, and if our personalities are spiritually attractive they will respond to us and allow us to lead them and feed them. I trust that we will be attractive children’s workers.

➤ DAVID WAS LOVED BY GOD

Despite all his weaknesses and problems God loved David very much and he was given one of the greatest titles anyone could be given – “*a man after God’s own heart*” (Acts 13 v22). And God protected that man whom He loved from the many things which could have happened to him, especially during his fugitive years and He brought him through safely to the throne He had prepared for him.

My dear friend God loves you and He will protect you and bring you also through to the place and ministry He has for you.



Acts 13 :22

"And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'"

Week 18: Theme – Psalm 23 (I)

Day 1

“The Lord is my Shepherd” (Psalm 23 v1a).

We all have our favourite parts of Scripture, but many would regard the twenty-third Psalm as their number one choice. For hundreds of years believers have been blessed and encouraged as they have read, and meditated on, the words of this wonderful Psalm.

Consequently, we will base our daily meditations both this week and next week on this special Psalm of David.

Psalm 23 is the central Psalm of a trilogy of David’s Psalms – and together they give us a wonderful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ:

- In Psalm 22 He is my Saviour.
This Psalm looks back, for me, into the past.
It is centred upon THE CROSS.
- In Psalm 24 He is my Sovereign.
This Psalm looks forward, for me, into the future.
It is centred upon THE CROWN.
- In Psalm 23 He is my Shepherd *“The Lord is my Shepherd”*.
This Psalm deals very clearly with my present situation.
It is centred upon THE CROOK.

Who is the Shepherd? It is THE LORD; it is JEHOVAH.

More specifically it is the Lord Jesus Christ Who said when He was here on earth, “I am the good Shepherd” (John 10 v11).

Who are the sheep? I am the sheep; you are the sheep; we are the sheep. But the emphasis is upon the personal relationship between the sheep and the Shepherd. The words, “me,” “my,” and “I,” are used 17 times in these six brief verses.

What does the Shepherd do? We will see this more clearly in the days which follow. But today we can look back to Isaiah 40 v11:

“He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.”

In this verse, set in the midst of a chapter which presents the power and sovereignty of God, we have a gentle and gracious picture of our God as our Shepherd:

- He feeds us, His sheep.
- He gathers the lambs, the young and sensitive sheep, in His arms.
- He carries them in His bosom – close to His heart of love.
- He leads us gently.

How wonderful it is to be able to say today, “The Lord is my Shepherd. He feeds me, lifts me, carries me and leads me.”

Day 2

“I shall not want” (Psalm 23 v1b).

Another translation of this verse is “I shall not lack anything” or “I shall lack nothing.”

We believe that the best way to teach a Bible lesson to children is to use our Bible passage and lesson to teach one simple straightforward Bible truth – and then to apply it to the children, using the word “therefore”. This is the method followed by David in this Psalm.

In the first part of the opening verse he states his central truth, “*The Lord is my Shepherd*”. In the second part of the same verse he gives a clear overall application “(Therefore) *I shall not lack anything*.” Why? Because He is my Shepherd.

The other five verses of the Psalm elaborate and explain this application by making it more specific and relating it to our special needs.

What are the five main things we need as His sheep?

- We need rest and peace. Verse 2 tells us we will not lack this.
“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.”
- We need guidance. Verse 3 informs us we will not lack this.
“He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”
- We need protection. Verse 4 lets us know we will never lack this.
“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”
- We need provision. Verse 5 assures us we will not lack this.
“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.”
- We need hope and assurance. Verse 6 emphasizes we will not lack these.
“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

Why will I not lack these five essential aspects and qualities of my life?

Because the Lord is my Shepherd. I may lack things I want; but I will not lack anything I need – materially or spiritually. Others who are wealthier and wiser may lack these things – but not His sheep.

David returns to this same thought in Psalm 34 verse 10:

“The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.”

This verse meant a lot to my wife and myself when God called us into full-time ministry with Child Evangelism Fellowship many years ago. It meant leaving a very good, secure, well paid job and stepping into a position where no salary was promised and which would be a complete step of faith. But on the basis of this verse we took that step and we can say that for all these years we have never wanted, or never lacked, any good thing.

How wonderful it is to be a sheep and have such a Shepherd!

Day 3

“He makes me to lie down” (Psalm 23 v2a).

Lying down is a picture of peace and rest. David expresses it like this:

“I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4 v8).

And our God, our Lord, our Shepherd helps us to lie down in peace and safety. I have enjoyed the book, *“A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23”* by Phillip Keller and I have learned a lot about sheep and shepherds from what he has written.

He writes that there are four things which prevent sheep from lying down – and I believe that each of these can be true also of us:

➤ FEAR

He writes, “As long as there is the slightest suspicion of danger from dogs, coyotes, cougars, bears or other enemies the sheep stand up ready to flee for their lives. They have little or no means of self-defense. They are helpless, timid, feeble creatures whose only recourse is to run.”

And then he adds, “I came to realize that nothing so quieted and reassured the sheep as to see me in the field. The presence of their master and owner and protector put them at ease as nothing else could do, and this applied day and night. In the Christian life there is no substitute for the keen awareness that my Shepherd is nearby. There is nothing like Christ’s presence to dispel the fear, the panic, the terror of the unknown.”

Is there something in the present or the future of which you are afraid? Your Shepherd is with you. You do not need to be afraid. He wants you to lie down.

➤ FRICTION

I did not know that sheep had this problem, or how they deal with it until I read Phillip Keller's book. He writes that one of the main responsibilities of the shepherd is to "deliver his sheep from the tension, rivalry and cruel competition within the herd."

He explains that there is what he calls "a butting order" within the flock. Usually one domineering old ewe is the boss of the flock and she butts and drives away other sheep from the best grass. And then these other sheep use the same tactics to butt away those below them in the order. Because of this rivalry, tension and competition for status and position there is friction in a flock and, as a result, the sheep cannot lie down and rest in contentment. Instead they must stand up and defend their rights and contest the challenge of the intruder; and they become edgy, tense, discontented and irritable.

But he adds that when the shepherd comes into view the sheep quickly forget their foolish rivalries and stop fighting. His presence makes all the difference.

Surely the application of this problem is clear? We should not butt, quarrel or compete for position. And if we recognize the presence of our Shepherd we will lie down in rest, peace, and contentment.

Day 4

"He makes me to lie down in green pastures"(Psalm 23 v2a).

Sheep find it difficult to lie and be at peace if they suffer from the problem of FEAR, or the problem of FRICTION. And we saw yesterday that this is also true of us. There are two more problems which prevent sheep from resting, lying down and being at peace.

FLIES

Sheep, Phillip Keller writes, can be driven to distraction by flies, and insects and parasites of all kinds. When tormented by these pests it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest. Instead they are up and on their feet, stamping their legs, shaking their head and ready to rush off into the bush for relief from the pests.

Only the diligent care of the shepherd who keeps a constant look out for these insects will prevent them from annoying his flock. And so he applies various types of insect repellents to his sheep. And he watches them carefully to see if there are any such problems. If there are, he takes steps to give them relief.

And in our Christian lives there are often many small irritations, frustrations and disagreeable experiences which prevent us from “lying down”. We sometimes call it “being bugged”!

But our Shepherd has given us the gracious Holy Spirit to live in us and He brings quietness, peace, serenity, strength and calmness in the face of frustrations and futility – and He deals with the bugging, if we allow Him to do so.

FOOD

Perhaps the greatest problem of all for the sheep, and the one which causes them great stress is hunger and lack of food. Phillip Keller writes, “Green pastures are essential to success with sheep. A hungry ill fed sheep is ever on its feet, on the move, searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try and satisfy its gnawing hunger. Such sheep are not contented, they do not thrive, they are no use to themselves nor to their owners.” And he emphasizes that one of the main responsibilities of the shepherd is to find, or even cultivate, pastures where they can eat and be at rest.

We too as believers need food, spiritual food and nourishment and if we don’t have it, or if we try to find it in the wrong places, we become hungry, discontented and unable to enjoy the peace our Shepherd wants us to have. But He wants us to be fed and satisfied and at rest; and so He helps us to lie down **in green pastures**. He leads us to those pastures and encourages us to partake of them. What and where are the green pastures?

Charles Spurgeon writes, “These green pastures are the Scriptures of truth – always fresh, always rich and never exhausted when by faith we are enabled to rest in the promises we are like the sheep that lie down in the midst of the pasture.” And he also emphasizes that it is not enough to “know the green pastures”; Our Shepherd helps us to “*lie down in them.*” May we do so!

Day 5

“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters” (Psalm 23 v2b).

This simple statement contains three basic truths which we as sheep need to understand and appropriate:

➤ **Our relationship with our Shepherd is personal.** *“He me.”*

Our Shepherd is concerned about us as individuals, and seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us. He is, of course, concerned about His flock as a whole but we read in John 10 v3 that *“He calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out.”*

➤ **His leadership of His sheep is essential. "He leads me."**

Sheep need water – or they will die of thirst. He knows where the good waters are. We don't. We can't find them but He leads us to them. Thirsty sheep are restless and we are told that they start looking for water – anywhere. If they are not led to good water they will drink from polluted waters and the result will be disease and parasites. And so the shepherd goes in front and leads them and they follow him to where the good water is.

And similarly the Lord Jesus tells us that, *"When He puts forth His own sheep He goes before them and (we) the sheep follow Him for they know His voice"* (John 10 v4). He leads us; He does not drive us. And if we follow Him our thirst will be quenched.

➤ **The satisfaction of His sheep is consequential (the result)**

The waters to which He leads us are a picture of satisfaction. It is at the waters where the thirst of the sheep is quenched. The Lord Jesus says in John 7 v37, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."* And verse 39 tells us that He is speaking here about the Holy Spirit. He is not *"the Spirit of fear but of power and of love and of self-discipline"* (2 Timothy 1 v7). We are satisfied by the *"influences and graces of the indwelling Holy Spirit"* – and our Shepherd leads us to those waters and encourages us to quench our thirst at them.

*"I heard the voice of Jesus say, behold I freely give.
The living water, thirsty one; stoop down and drink and live.
I came to Jesus and I drank of that life giving stream.
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived and now I live in Him."*

But the still waters to which He leads us are also a picture of peace and quietness. The words could be translated *"the waters of rest"*. And how much we His sheep need to be beside those still waters, those waters of rest in a world which is so restless, anxious and disturbing.

One last thought. Phillip Keller tells us that one of the best ways for sheep to have their thirst quenched is to be awake early and enjoy the early morning dew on the grass. The application is obvious.

Day 6

"He restores my soul" (Psalm 23 v3a).

These are the words of one of God's sheep. Restoration is the experience of a believer – not an unbeliever. Christians can become so distressed in soul that they need restoration; they can become weak and discouraged and in need of a recovery of strength. Christians can backslide. Who of us can say that we have never needed restoration?

David the author of this Psalm certainly knew the need and reality of restoration in his own life:

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" (Psalm 42 v11).

It is interesting to see David's use of the words "cast down" in this verse. Phillip Keller tells us in his book that shepherds often speak of their sheep as being "cast down" or "cast". A cast sheep is one which has turned over on its back and cannot get up again. It lies down, rolls over and cannot rise. Gas builds up inside its body in that position and, if the shepherd does not come soon, it could die. Also there are animals who look for cast sheep and attack them in that position.

The shepherd counts his sheep and one is missing: "It is cast somewhere", he thinks, "I must find it and set it on its feet again."

He finds it, helps it to its feet, rubs its limbs to restore circulation and helps it to walk. It then runs away to join the others.

We Christians, as God's sheep, also fall from time to time. We are then sheep who are "cast down" or "cast"; and we need someone to help us stand and walk again and that Someone is our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many have the idea that when this happens He becomes disgusted, fed up and furious with us. No! – He loves us, is concerned for us and eagerly wants to get us back on our feet again. Peter gave a good testimony as to how the Lord Jesus did this for him.

We need to be realistic. We often need Him to restore our souls.

Phillip Keller tells us there are three reasons why sheep are cast – on their backs and helpless; and I feel that we could apply each of these to us as sheep:

- Sheep look for soft rounded ground where they can be really comfortable – and the more comfortable they become, the more difficult it is for them to get up. They need to avoid too much comfort.
- Some sheep have too much wool and it can become matted and so heavy that they cannot rise. The shepherd needs to cut it off.

- Some sheep are too fat, self-indulgent and perspiring and their weight becomes their problem. The shepherd needs to put them on a diet.

Can you see the applications to human sheep?

Charles Spurgeon writes, "When the soul grows sorrowful He revives it; when it is sinful He sanctifies it; when it is weak He strengthens it. Are any of us low in grace? Do we feel that our spirituality is at its lowest ebb? He who turns the ebb into the flood can soon restore our soul if we ask Him."

Day 7

"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake"
(Psalm 23 v3b).

In verse 2 we read that *"He leads me beside the still waters"*. The purpose of that leading is to give us peace and satisfaction. But in this verse He leads us, as we shall see, not to give us something but to get something from us.

We will examine each word of this text:

- *"Leads"*

There are three principles involved in this leadership:

- ✓ The sheep don't know where to go. They follow the same tracks which soon become ruts; they keep grazing in the same pastures until it is destroyed. They need leadership.
- ✓ The shepherd knows where they should go and he knows how to take them there. He needs to keep them moving from one pasture to another.
- ✓ The sheep therefore need to follow the shepherd as the Lord Jesus tells us:

"And when He brings out His own sheep, He goes before them; and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice" (John 10 v4).

- *"Heme"*

We note again the personal nature of this leadership. He *"calls His own sheep by name"* (John 10 v3). And we respond individually to His leadership.

- *"In the paths of righteousness"*

This is where He leads us - into a life of holiness and righteousness. These are the paths He wants us to tread. This is not a leading or guidance or call to service. This is a leading to a holy life.

We all want to know God's will for our lives; and THIS IS primarily and, above all, His will. This is the direction He wants to lead us:

"This is the will of God even your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4 v3a).

"Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5 v16-18).

This is what He wants more than anything else.

➤ ***"For His Name's sake"***

These words explain the purpose and reason for His leading in the paths of righteousness. And they also explain the goal He has in leading us the way He does. It is *"for His Name's sake"* for He will be glorified in our lives. When we walk and live righteously He is glorified and His Name is exalted: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5 v16).

He leads us by the still waters to GIVE US peace and satisfaction. He leads us in the paths of righteousness so that we can GIVE HIM praise and honour and glory.

Are we doing so?



Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters. He restores
my soul; He leads me in the paths of
righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though
I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You
prepare a table before me in the presence of my
enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup
runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me all the days of my life; and I
will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever."*

Week 19: Psalm 23 (II)

Day 1

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me" (Psalm 23 v4a).

This verse is the beginning of the second half of the Psalm because the sheep are now, for the first time, addressing the shepherd, with the obvious implication of a closer fellowship together between the two. This verse has three parts:

➤ **The trouble faced**

The Psalmist speaks here about *"the valley of the shadow of death"*:

- ✓ This is usually thought of in connection with death itself, and is often used as a means of comfort to those who have been bereaved, or to those who are facing death. This is, of course, very true.
- ✓ Others have seen it as not pointing to death itself but to a time of great sadness, darkness, and difficulty, a process or walk through a dark gloomy valley – a valley such as sheep have to go through – with dark mountains on each side, with enemies shooting at them from those sides, and, in the valley, wild animals and landslides.
But a valley can also be a blessing for the sheep who go through it – that's where the water and grass are; and it is through such valleys that the sheep can get access to bigger pastures.

And the valleys we go through can be places of both difficulty and blessing.

➤ **The truth believed**

The Psalmist breathes these words to the Shepherd *"You are with me."* This is a statement or truth which when believed brings security, safety, strength and even sweetness to the sheep. He is with us in the valley.

The Lord Jesus, our Shepherd, has promised us His presence:

"I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28 v20b).

This truth could well be the greatest promise in the Bible and is repeated over and over again especially at times of great need (Joshua 1 v5, 9).

➤ **The triumph experienced**

The Psalmist then expresses two wonderful results of believing that great truth:

- ✓ *"I will fear no evil."* His presence removes fear.

- ✓ “ *I walk through the valley.*” His presence enables us to keep walking through the valley.

The one who walks through life’s dark valleys without fear, and with his head held high is the one who is a tower of strength, a means of inspiration to his “fellow sheep” and a source of joy to his Shepherd.

Day 2

“Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23 v4b).

In the Middle East, in biblical times, the shepherd carried a minimum of equipment, which consisted of two main pieces – a rod and a staff.

➤ **A rod**

In Africa today a shepherd boy selects a young tree and whittles it down to a club with a round head (which is usually part of the base of the tree). He then learns how to throw it. It is his main line of defence against wild animals and marauders. And the rod in our verse is similar – especially in its use.

The shepherd’s rod is a weapon of power:

- ✓ It is used to defend the sheep from their enemies – especially wild animals.
- ✓ It is used to discipline the sheep. If sheep wander, and even start eating poisonous plants, the shepherd can use or throw his rod to bring them back into line.
- ✓ It is also used to examine the sheep, to prod under the wool and see if there is any problem there.

But in every case this powerful rod brings comfort to the sheep. That’s what our verse says.

This rod, this instrument of power, is like the Word of God:

- ✓ It defends us from the evil one.
- ✓ It disciplines us when we stray and leads us to repentance.
- ✓ It examines us carefully.

And the Word of God brings us comfort as we respond to our Shepherd Who speaks to us through it.

➤ **A staff**

A staff is a long slender stick with a crook or hook on one end. This is not so much an instrument of power as an instrument of care and management. The staff is a symbol of the shepherd’s concern and compassion. It speaks not of power, defence or discipline – but of long suffering and kindness.

- ✓ It is used to draw the lamb close to its mother and the sheep close to its shepherd.
 - ✓ It is used to guide the sheep by tapping it gently against its sides.
 - ✓ It is used to rescue sheep who have got into problems, to lift them out of the water or out of the bushes in which they have become entangled.
- For us the staff is a picture of the Holy Spirit Who lives in us and Who is the Comforter or Helper. The Bible records that the early churches “walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit and were multiplied” (Acts 9 v31).
- ✓ The Holy Spirit draws us closer to the Lord Jesus (John 15 v26; 16 v14).
 - ✓ The Holy Spirit guides us (John 16 v13).
 - ✓ The Holy Spirit helps us when we have problems (John 14 v18).

The Bible is our rod; the Holy Spirit is our staff.

Day 3

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (Psalm 23 v5a).

There are two views concerning the meaning and significance of this verse:

- The first view sees a change in the picture. The shepherd and sheep of earlier verses become in these verses the host and the guest. The host spreads the table for his guest, anoints his head with oil and fills his cup to overflowing.
This is the usual viewpoint. And it emphasizes the continued repetition of the word “You”. Everything has been prepared by the host, (which is a picture of the Lord Jesus), and for his guests (which is a picture of us).
- The other view retains the picture of a shepherd and sheep:
 - ✓ The table represents food for the sheep.
 - ✓ The cup represents drink for the sheep.
 - ✓ The oil represents healing and cleansing for the sheep.

I prefer this second viewpoint because it continues the shepherd/sheep image of the Psalm and because it fits in better with the concept of “enemies” of whom the sheep have many.

Philip Keller in his book *“A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23”* gives an interesting interpretation of *“the table prepared in the presence of enemies”* which corresponds with this second viewpoint.

He writes that in summertime the shepherd leads his sheep up to the high land, onto the plateau – or the table land as it is usually called. But before he does that he goes up onto the table land and prepares it for his sheep:

- ✓ He surveys it.
- ✓ He chooses places to graze.
- ✓ He clears out the water holes.
- ✓ He finds poisonous weeds and either removes them or avoids them.
- ✓ He puts supplies of salt and minerals here and there for future use.

Then he leads his sheep onto the table land. The wild animals which are the enemies of the sheep lurk, watch and drool – but the shepherd watches for them and keeps them at bay.

He has prepared the table or table land for his sheep and he protects them from the wild animals which are there.

We, as the sheep of the Good Shepherd have two main needs – and He our Shepherd meets both of them.

- ✓ **The provision of our needs**

“He prepares a table before us” and on that table there is all that we need. It is a bountiful table – and is ready for us.

We need to come to Him.

- ✓ **Protection from our enemies**

We don’t need to worry about *“the presence of our enemies”*.

He protects us from them and keeps us safe.

We need to stay close to Him.

Day 4

“You anoint my head with oil” (Psalm 23 v5b).

We are still on the table land and it is still summer. The table land has been well prepared and the wild animals have been kept at bay.

But oil is needed for the sheep and the shepherd meets three main needs of the sheep by anointing their heads with oil:

- Summertime is “fly time” up on the table land. The insects really come out and swarm – all kinds of flies and parasites, and especially “nose flies” which can even cause blindness.

These flies are torture for the sheep:

- ✓ They become frightened with fear and start to race and run.
- ✓ They beat their heads against the rocks.
- ✓ They can even lose their eyesight.

At the first sign of the flies, the shepherd applies an antidote to their heads – a mixture of oil, tar and sulphur. There is an immediate change in their behaviour and there is no more aggression, frenzy or restlessness. They become quiet and contented.

We also have “flies” which irritate us and cause problems. But the oil of the Holy Spirit – the One Who has anointed every believer – gives peace and contentment. The Holy Spirit CURES those who are afflicted in this way.

- Summertime is “scab time”. Sheep often have skin problems on the table land; and as they come into contact with each other, the skin problems spread. And so the shepherd needs to “dip” the sheep. He prepares a liquid mixture of oil, sulphur and spices and immerses the sheep in it. This cleans their skin and removes the scabs.

We too have problems as we come into contact with sin and the world. We become infected very easily and we need “the oil” of the Holy Spirit to CLEANSE us and keep us clean. Our heads which harbour our thoughts and contain our tongues especially need cleansing.

- The end of the summer comes up on the table land. It is cooler and there are no flies or insects. This is for the sheep the mating season and the rams or male sheep start to battle for the ewes. They really do fight each other – head on – and as they butt each other they can cause hurt and damage. Do you know what the shepherd does? It’s very simple. He smears the rams’ heads with oil and grease; and when they butt and collide their heads glance off each other and no damage is caused.

We as Christians need to avoid friction, fighting and factions in our relationship with other Christians. And the oil of the Holy Spirit when applied to us (and especially to our heads and tongues) CALMS us and gives us peace.

The Holy Spirit is the One Who has anointed each person who has trusted Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1 v21; 1 John 2 v20, 27); and He is the One Who cures, cleanses and calms each sheep.

Day 5

“My cup runs over” (Psalm 23 v5a).

We continue with our picture of sheep and how the shepherd looks after them and ministers to them.

We have followed in this verse an interesting sequence:

- In early summer the shepherd prepares the table land for the sheep.
- All summer the shepherd anoints the heads of the sheep with oil.
- And now it is late summer and autumn and the sheep are returning to their home pastures.

This is a golden time for the sheep, the weather is lovely, there are no flies, no insects and no scabs. Mating has been completed and the sheep's stomachs are full.

This is the best season of all for the sheep. They are fit, well and strong.

Therefore the sheep can truly say, "My cup is full." And, more than that, its cup is so full it cannot be contained; it runs over.

This full cup reminds us of our experience and of the blessings we receive each day. It is a picture of at least two things:

- A picture of JOY. Everything is so good, I am so happy.
"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4 v4).
- A picture of CONTENTMENT. All is well.
"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4 v11).

How is it possible for you and me to enjoy these two cups?

The same chapter in Philippians gives the answer:

"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me" (Philippians 4 v12, 13).

The Lord Jesus Himself invites us to come to Him and drink:

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink'" (John 7 v37).

He, through the Holy Spirit (John 7 v39) quenches our thirst and fills our cup. But our cup should not only be full; it should be running over. And when it runs over, the saucer will also be able to drink. This is what the Lord Jesus said should happen:

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7 v38).

And the following verse tells us that it is the Holy Spirit Who enables us to do that:

"But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, Whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7 v39).

Is your cup full? Is it running over?

Day 6

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm 23 v6a).

The sheep is now looking towards its future; not just its immediate future – but the rest of its life; and it does so with a strong note of assurance using the word "shall". As far as it is concerned the future is clear and definite.

And we as our Lord's sheep can echo these words, and have the same clear assurance.

This statement can be looked at from two different viewpoints:

- It gives, first of all, a picture of the shepherd and what He does for me. My shepherd's goodness and mercy shall always follow me and be with me:
 - ✓ He will always treat me with goodness. All He does is for my good (Romans 8 v28). Individual hardships or problems cause us difficulty – but they are like the ingredients of a cake. On their own they are hard to take and not palatable – but they are mixed together by the Master – cooked for our good.
 - ✓ He will always treat me with mercy; He will forgive my shortcomings and failures; and He will pick me up if I fall or wander.

His goodness supplies me with temporal blessings and meets my needs; His mercy supplies me with spiritual blessings and blots out my sins.

His goodness and mercy follow me at all times:

- ✓ Like two guardian angels at my back.
- ✓ Like two servants who wait on me.
- ✓ Like two sheep dogs guiding and barking at my heels!

The result is that I am content.

- It gives, secondly, a picture of me, a picture of what I will leave behind me and what will follow me.

I should leave behind, as my legacy, goodness and mercy to other people. It is recognized that sheep if well managed can benefit the land and leave a good legacy behind them for other sheep to enjoy:

- ✓ The excellent manure they leave benefits the soil and gives growth to the grass.
- ✓ They eat the weeds and undesirable plants and clean up the pasture.

Those who follow after them find good grassland.

Of course if the sheep are not well managed the opposite will happen. But we have the best manager and best Shepherd of all, and He will help us to leave behind the right legacy for those who follow us.

What follows me wherever I go? Am I good and merciful to others? Do I leave a trail of sadness or gladness?

Many years ago a man crossed and criss-crossed America. He was called Johnny Appleseed. Why? Because everywhere he went he planted apple seeds. Years later these grew into trees. And others could clearly see where Johnny had been because he left behind a legacy of apple trees.

What is your legacy to others?

Day 7

“And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23 v6b). What a wonderful conclusion and climax to this wonderful Psalm. We can understand it better for ourselves by asking four simple questions:

➤ WHO will dwell?

I will dwell in the house of the Lord. This verse, like the whole Psalm, is very personal. *“The Lord is my Shepherd He leads me I will fear no evil my cup runs over goodness and mercy shall follow me.”*

➤ WHAT will I do?

I WILL DWELL in the house of the Lord

These two words give the impression of sitting down, resting, remaining, and being still – in a place of quietness and peace.

➤ WHERE will I dwell?

In the HOUSE OF THE LORD

This phrase could have any one of four meanings – more likely all four!

✓ It could refer to the SANCTUARY, place of worship or church, as in Psalm 122 v1 or John 2 v16. But, while this is often the meaning of the phrase in Scripture, it is not the most likely one here – because those sanctuaries are not eternal.

✓ It could refer to HEAVEN. This is the most obvious meaning because of its reference to eternity.

“In My Father’s house” said the Lord Jesus, *“there are many mansions”* (John 14 v2).

That will be the end of the sheep’s journey and the beginning of another, more wonderful, one.

✓ It could refer to HOME, family and household – the fold of God’s sheep to which the sheep come back at the end of their journey to the table land. And in the house or fold, which is eternal, the sheep will be content because they will never leave again, the Shepherd will manifest His love and never allow any more parting, and the bond which has already been put in place will be eternally strengthened.

✓ It could mean the PRESENCE of the Lord – a presence in which we now dwell, and one in which we will dwell eternally.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, *“While I am here, I am a child of God at home with God and in His house. When I ascend into the upper chamber I shall not change my company nor even the house, I shall only go to dwell in the upper house of the Lord forever.”*

"One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple" (Psalm 27 v4).

- WHEN will I dwell in the house of the Lord?
"Forever", "For length of days", "For eternity." What a wonderful assurance and what a glorious prospect!



Psalm 27 :4

*"One thing I have desired of the Lord,
That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of
the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the
beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple."*

Week 20: Theme – Elijah, God's Man

Day 1

“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word” (1 Kings 17v1).

Elijah is one of the most outstanding and fascinating people in the Bible.

His name

The name Elijah means “My God is Jehovah”; and this name is particularly suited to the person who bore it. He took a strong and clear stand for his God in all the difficult circumstances which surrounded him.

His origin

He came from the mountains of Gilead on the eastern side of the river Jordan. He was born in the little town of Tishbek and was known as the Tishbite. His birth was humble and his background simple. His success did not lie in himself, his upbringing, his education or his training – but in his God Jehovah.

His first words to Ahab

These words in our verse provide a basis for the ministry which would follow:

- He identifies his God
 - ✓ He is the Lord God. The Hebrew word translated “God” is “ELOHIM” and signifies power and sovereignty. This Hebrew word translated “Lord” is JEHOVAH – the eternal self-existent One.
 - ✓ He is the Lord God of Israel. He wanted to emphasize that this great God, Jehovah, was the King and Ruler of the nation – not Ahab.
 - ✓ He is a living God in stark contradiction to the lifeless idols in Israel.
- He clarifies his position

He made it clear that he stood before God – not Ahab. His allegiance was to Someone much more exalted than Ahab.
- He makes a statement

As God's prophet and representative he declares that there will be no rain or dew in the land. He was not afraid to pass on the message of judgment which God had revealed to him.

Three references in the New Testament

- He had an EXTRAORDINARY CAREER like John the Baptist (Matthew 11 v14) – a turner of hearts and a preparer of people (Luke 1 v17).
- He took part in an EXCEPTIONAL CONVERSATION with the Lord Jesus (Mark 9 v4). This was the highlight of Elijah's experience.
- He is shown as an EXCITING COMPARISON with ourselves. James wrote that he was a man like us (James 5 v17). He was a spiritual giant – but we can become spiritual giants also.

Day 2

“Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.’” (1 Kings 17 v2 and 3).

The Provision Elijah Enjoyed (I)

We have often heard or used statements like:

“The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.”

“God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies.”

And Elijah's experience after he delivered his message to Ahab bears out both of those statements.

➤ **God spoke to Elijah:**

✓ Go to the brook Cherith. ✓ Hide yourself.

✓ Drink water from the brook. ✓ I will send ravens to feed you.

There were all kinds of reasons why Elijah should hesitate to go – or even to disobey. Would it not be better to denounce Ahab publicly? Why go away from the scene of action? How can I drink water from the brook if there is going to be a drought? Whoever heard of ravens feeding people – would they not eat the food themselves?

➤ **Elijah obeyed**

But Elijah did exactly what God told him to do.

➤ **God provided**

He had two good meals every day. Not bread; not bread and water; but bread, meat and water. The ravens brought bread and meat every morning and evening, and Elijah enjoyed the fresh water of the brook.

The ravens came exactly as they were directed to the right person in the right place – where God had sent him. And this still happens. God still provides us with all we need when we are in the place He sent us to.

➤ **Elijah stayed**

In the course of time, there was a serious change in the circumstances around Elijah. We read in 2 Kings 17 v7 that *"after a while the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land."* This change was gradual and each day the level of the brook got lower and lower until it finally dried up. But Elijah did not move away from there. He remained beside that drying brook because God had sent him there.

Is there a lesson for us to learn? When God directs us to a ministry or a place we must stay there no matter what happens – whether a disappointment, or a loss of friendship, or a lack of money, or even a change in our health.

We must only move or change when God directs us to do so. That is what happened to Elijah. In verse 8, *"the Word of the Lord came"* and told him to move – and he did so immediately.

Day 3

"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you" (1 Kings 17 v9).

The Provision Elijah Enjoyed (II)

God spoke

God told Elijah to go to Zarephath. But it was not easy for him to do so:

- It was 160 kilometers away through a land where he was sought and hated.
- There was famine in the land. How would he eat and drink during his journey?
- Zarephath was in a foreign country – Jezebel's home country.
- He was told that he would be completely dependent on a widow woman – and not the other way round.
- And this woman was from a heathen background.

This was an even more difficult command to obey than the previous command to go to Cherith. It would be a real test for the prophet. The name Zarephath means *"a smelting furnace"* – and that was an appropriate name for Elijah's next step.

Elijah obeyed

But Elijah obeyed and went on that long journey to the widow's home at Zarephath. It had been a further test, or examination, for the prophet – and he passed again, with flying colours.

God provided

And then followed a series of miracles as God looked after His obedient servant:

- The widow woman was there at the gate of the city when Elijah arrived.
- She was willing, at his request, to use what she had left to provide a meal for Elijah. God had worked in her heart.
- The little meal, and the oil which she had, never ran done – and as a result Elijah, the widow woman and her son, were able to eat every day until the rain started again (verse 14).
- When the widow's son died God used Elijah to raise him from the dead (verse 22).

God blessed

Not only did God supply all Elijah's needs – but He also blessed the widow woman who was willing to give what she had to God's prophet. He gave her and her son all the food they needed during a time of famine; and He brought her son back to life. It is more blessed to give than to receive – and God always blesses the one who gives.

Elijah has been learning the lessons which we all need to learn:

- If we are in the place God wants us to be He will sustain us and supply our needs – either by a miracle or by ordinary means.
- The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God cannot help us.
- They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.

Day 4

The Prayers Elijah Prayed (I)

“Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived” (1 Kings 17 v22).

We can see that Elijah was a man who lived in close communion with God:

- By the many times when God spoke to him. We read over and over again that *“the Word of God came to him”* (e.g. 1 Kings 17 v2; 17 v8; 18 v1).
- By the times when it is recorded that Elijah spoke to God. Three main prayers are recorded, each of which can be of great benefit to us in our prayer life.

Elijah's Prayer for a Child (1 Kings 17 v20-22)

The problem he faced

The son of the widow, in whose house he had been living and whose food he had been enjoying, fell ill and died. Such a sad happening must have upset Elijah and may even have caused him to wonder why this should have happened.

The criticism he experienced

For some reason the widow blamed Elijah for the child's death (verse 18). She accused him of reminding her of some past sin – and of causing the child to die.

The reaction he showed

He did not react wrongfully to such a false accusation. He demonstrated a quiet and gentle spirit to his accuser – and instead of rebuking her or even defending himself he asked for the body of her son and took him to his room.

The prayer he prayed

It must be recognized that there had never been a resurrection from the dead previously. Elijah was facing a completely new situation and he had nothing on which he could rely – except his faith in an omnipotent God:

- He spoke to God on the basis of his relationship to Him, “*O Lord my God.*”
- He expressed his concern to God. He did not know why this had happened.
- He stretched himself upon the child's body to show his affection for the child and his identification with him. He wanted to be in as close contact with him as possible.
- He asked God to bring the child back to life. It was a simple short prayer.
- He persevered and did not give up – because he stretched himself on the child three times and probably prayed this same prayer three times.

The answer he saw

And we read that, “*the Lord heard the voice of Elijah.*” The child came back to life and Elijah took him back to his mother.

The words he heard

The widow immediately witnessed to his standing as a man of God and that what he said was the true Word of God. Her testimony to him was, at the same time, a testimony to the God Who had performed this miracle.

May we learn from this prayer the importance of praying for our children who are spiritually dead – and may we, as a result, see them “come to life.”

Day 5

The Prayers Elijah Prayed (II)

“Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed” (1 Kings 18 v32).

Elijah is probably best known and remembered because of his great confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

Elijah's Prayer for Fire (1 Kings 18 v36, 37)

Elijah, King Ahab, eight hundred and fifty prophets and vast crowds of Israelites gathered together on Mount Carmel for what would prove to be one of the most exciting events ever recorded.

The challenge of Eijah

He wanted the Israelites to see and know, once and for all, that there was only one God – Jehovah, the God of Israel. He asked for two altars to be built, two bullocks to be killed and laid on the altars. Then first of all the prophets of Baal, and afterwards he himself, would call upon the name of their God or gods to send fire. The God Who answered would be the one and only true God.

The failure of the prophets

No matter how long or how loudly they prayed nothing happened. They went on all day and even cut themselves with knives – but no result.

The prayer of Elijah

Before Elijah prayed he rebuilt the altar which had been broken down, and to make the result of his prayer especially miraculous he dug a trench around the altar and poured large quantities of water over the sacrifice and into the trench. And when he prayed God answered and sent fire to consume the sacrifice.

There are several features of Elijah's prayer which can help us in our prayer life:

- It was a short prayer. The prophets had prayed for six hours with no success. Elijah prayed for around 20 seconds.
- It was a specific prayer. He asked God to demonstrate His presence and power to the children of Israel.
- It was a prayer which had, as its purpose, the glory of God and the vindication of His name. Elijah's over-ruling desire and motive in praying was that his God should be honoured and glorified.
- It was a prayer which also asked God to demonstrate that he, Elijah, was His servant. This was not a desire for self-glory – but that the people might know that he represented God here on earth.
- It was a prayer based on God's Word. He said in his prayer that "*I have done all these things at Your Word.*" Elijah was praying in accordance with the will of God as it had been revealed to him – and prayer based upon the Word of God always receives a positive answer.
- It was a prayer of faith. Elijah knew that God would answer his prayer and that was why he doused the sacrifice with water. He wanted everyone to see that God would not only answer his prayer but that He could do what seemed impossible. Are there lessons we need to learn from this prayer?

Day 6

"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit" (James 5 v17 and 18).

The fire has fallen and the people have proclaimed "*The Lord He is the God; the Lord He is the God.*" And this great event is followed by another of equal fascination which also takes place on Mount Carmel

Elijah's Prayer for Rain (1 Kings 18 v41-46)

Elijah's first prayer on Mount Carmel was very public; this one was very private. The first prayer was for fire; the second for water. He prayed that rain might come after three and half years of drought, and God answered his prayer and sent the rain. There are again a number of lessons we can learn from this great prayer – and God shows His desire for us to learn them by using Elijah as an example for us and our prayer life in our verses for today:

- He withdrew himself (verse 42) and prayed alone in an attitude of humility and reverence with "*his face between his knees.*" There was no flippancy. He was entering the presence of the Lord God Jehovah. He had stood like an oak before men; he was now bent like a sapling before God. He who stands straightest in the presence of men bows lowest in the presence of God. We also need to approach God in humility and reverence.
- He prayed sacrificially (1 Kings 17 v42). While others including the king feasted Elijah prayed. It had been a long and hard day but Elijah took time to pray. Similarly we must be willing to sacrifice so that we can pray and this might mean spending less time in bed.
- He prayed scripturally (1 Kings 18 v1). God had told him that He would send rain upon the earth, so his prayer was based upon God's Word. And I am sure that Elijah was also well acquainted with Deuteronomy 11 verses 15-17. As a result Elijah was in line with God's promise. And we need to discover God's will from His Word and pray on the basis of that will.
- He prayed specifically (1 Kings 18 v43; James 5 v18). It was a simple and specific prayer. "*He prayed and the heavens gave rain.*" He had originally prayed, equally specifically, that it would not rain (James 5 v17) and it didn't rain for three and a half years. Now he prayed that it would rain – and the rain came.

Similarly we need to be specific in our prayers.

- He prayed believingly (1 Kings 18 v43-44). He expected God to answer his prayer and so he kept asking his servant to look and see if the rain was on its way.

Do we really believe that God can and will answer our prayers? Let us especially learn to do this from this prayer of Elijah.

Day 7

“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5 v16).

We are examining Elijah's second prayer on Mount Carmel and learning lessons from it to help us in our prayer life. We have seen yesterday that he prayed reverently, sacrificially, scripturally, specifically and believingly.

- He also prayed perseveringly (verse 43). He did not give up. He kept praying until the first cloud appeared. Nothing happened at first and he sent his servant seven times to see if the rain was coming.

We need to learn to persevere in prayer and never to give up until the answer comes (read Luke 18 v1-8).

- He prayed earnestly or fervently as yesterday's verse told us and today's verse repeats this fact. This was serious business. And we need to be equally earnest and fervent in our prayer life.
- His prayers were backed up by a righteous life, as we also read in today's verse. It is the prayer of a righteous man like Elijah which *“avails much”*. And we need to be sure that there is no deliberate sin in our lives which is hindering our prayer (Isaiah 59 v1 and 2).

And, as a result, God sent the rain (verse 45).

We look at Elijah and we see him as a man of power who did a mighty work for God, a man of courage who stood up for the truth, a man of prayer who saw his prayers answered and a righteous man who lived for God – and we often react by saying that we could never be like him. But the Bible reminds us that *“Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are”* (James 5 v17), and this encourages us to believe that God can use us in some way as He did Elijah.

- The God Who gave Elijah the strength to stand and witness without compromise can do the same for us.
- The God who supplied Elijah's needs can supply ours.
- The God who used Elijah and worked through him can use us and work through us.

- The God who answered Elijah's prayers can answer ours.
- And thinking back to the time when Elijah was so discouraged after the events on Mount Carmel and was on the point of giving up, the God Who was so kind and gracious to Elijah at that time of failure is the same God Who will be kind and gracious to us in our time of need.

Elisha, the successor to Elijah cried, *"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"* (2 Kings 2 v14).

Our answer is "He is here. He is our God – and He is the same yesterday, today and forever."

- We know that He hears our prayers (Isaiah 65 v24).
- We know that He answers our prayers (Matthew 7 v7).

Can we not trust Him to do so?



1 Kings 17:24

"Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth."

Week 21:

Theme – Discouragement

Day 1

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Psalm 42 v11).

During this week we are going to look at one of the greatest problems faced by Christian workers – the problem of discouragement; and we will look at this subject under five headings:

- The recognition (or definition) of discouragement. What is it?
- The reality of discouragement. Is it a problem?
- The reasons for discouragement. What causes it?
- The results of discouragement. What does it cause?
- The remedy for discouragement. How can I deal with it?

The recognition (definition) of discouragement

The dictionary describes it as a “loss of courage, confidence, enthusiasm or energy.” Alternative words for discouragement include “cast down, demoralized, disheartened, depressed.” I am sure that we all know what it is – from personal experience!

The reality of discouragement

Discouragement is a real problem for many Christian workers:

- It was a problem for many great men of God in the Bible:
 - ✓ Moses was discouraged on many occasions:
“What will I do with this people? They are going to stone me” (Exodus 17 v4).
 - ✓ The Psalmist, as expressed in our Bible verse for today, was discouraged:
“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?” (Psalm 42 v5, 11; Psalm 43 v5).
 - ✓ Elijah requested for himself that he might die and said *“It is enough. Now O Lord take away my life for I am not better than my fathers” (1 Kings 19 v4).*
- It was a problem for some outstanding Christian missionaries and preachers in church history:

- ✓ Charles Spurgeon suffered bouts of deep depression and discouragement.
- ✓ William Carey experienced many discouragements in his missionary work in India:
 - His wife became mentally unbalanced.
 - His translations of the Bible were destroyed in a fire.
 - He saw few results in his ministry.
- Undoubtedly you will experience discouragement in your life and ministry. Remember the Psalmist's response to his discouragement in our verse – *"HOPE in God."*

Day 2

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14 v1).

The reasons for discouragement

There are at least four factors which can lead to our discouragement:

- Our own mistakes and shortcomings can bring discouragement.
 - by stress and overwork and over tiredness
 - by oversensitivity
 - by worry
 - by trying to do something we cannot or should not do
 - by personal failures

Peter, for example, was discouraged after the trial and death of the Lord Jesus – but it was mainly his own fault.
- Other people can cause discouragement.
 - through their criticism, opposition, misunderstanding and resistance
 - by letting us down and disappointing us
 - by not appreciating us or praising us

Moses, for example, was discouraged by the people he was leading.
- Circumstances can cause discouragement
 - health problems which we or our co-workers face
 - the resignation of a co-worker
 - unanswered prayer
 - loneliness

Elijah was certainly discouraged by Jezebel's threats.
- Our work can cause discouragement.
 - because it is not going well

- because of lack of finance, or workers
- because of lack of results
- because of division and disagreement

Paul was discouraged because of the moral problems at Corinth, and the doctrinal problems in Galatia.

The results of discouragement

Discouragement or depression brings consequences:

- the loss of peace and joy
- exhaustion, sleeplessness and bad health
- irritability and the criticism of others
- the inability to face problems
- the loss of blessing personally and in the work
- the temptation to give up and quit

The Lord Jesus does not want us to be troubled and discouraged, as our verse tells us - He wants us to trust God the Father and Himself.

Day 3

"Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come"

(Acts 26 v22).

And now we are ready to look more fully at the remedy for discouragement.

The remedy for discouragement

How can you and I deal with discouragement?

Today I would like to share three introductory thoughts with regard to this remedy:

- It is always better to deal with a problem before it comes. The best way to deal with discouragement is to avoid it - rather than having to overcome it afterwards.

Therefore it is important to understand the reasons for discouragement and avoid those things that cause it.

Of course some things cannot be avoided, such as bad health, or unanswered prayers (but we can ensure that we face these circumstances in the right way). We cannot avoid problems we face in our work (but we must have the right reaction to them).

However the discouragement which results from our own mistakes and shortcomings can be avoided by not overworking, or worrying, or trying to do something we cannot do.

- If there is a problem which causes discouragement and can be solved – then solve it.

Perhaps it is a relationship between yourself and another worker. If so then go to the worker (according to either Matthew 5 v23 and 24 or Matthew 18 v15-17) and make things right.

If you are overtired you should get more sleep, or if you are lonely you should make an effort to meet and be friendly with more people.

- Whatever you do – DON'T GIVE UP!

Quitting is no answer. It is not even the “easy way out”. The person who quits because of problems will soon run into other, and greater, problems. The grass may seem greener on the other side of the fence – but when you get there you will find it is no different from the grass on this side of the fence.

We need to follow the example of the apostle Paul in Acts 26 v22. In verse 19 he spoke of his “*obedience to the heavenly vision*”, and in verse 20 how he became the “apostle to the Gentiles.” But there were consequences – serious consequences. In verse 21 we read, “*For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.*” But Paul did not quit because of the problem. He was able to say in today’s verse “*Having therefore obtained help of God I continue until this day.*” He did not allow the threats and opposition to stop him. He continued to obey the heavenly vision.

And we must do the same.

Day 4

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8 v28).

What then is the remedy for discouragement?

There are, I believe, three simple steps which we need to take:

- THINK ABOUT GOD.

You need to focus your attention on Him; not on yourself and your failures; not on others and their criticism; not on the circumstances you face; and not on the problems in your work.

When you are discouraged, disappointed and depressed set your eyes ON GOD.

We as Christians are so egocentric. We find it easy to focus upon ourselves, our work, our problems, our family. You and I need to change the direction of our thinking and refocus upon God:

- ✓ You need to see Him as SOVEREIGN.

He is in complete control of every circumstance and problem and you need to understand that everything which happens has either been sent by Him, or allowed by Him, as we can see in our Bible verse for today. There is no third alternative; if there were He would not be sovereign. **All** things are under His control, and **all** things work together for our good (Romans 8 v28).

- ✓ You need to see Him as WISE.

He knows what He is doing. He has a plan for your life and for your ministry; He has a way to bring you to where He wants you to be; and is working all the time to that end. He is going to use all these problems to prepare you for your future service, and more importantly, to make you more like the Lord Jesus.

Joseph learned this lesson over and over again; and he saw that all the problems he faced which could have become good reasons for his discouragement, were allowed, or sent, by God to make him the person he would become, and to bring him to the place of ministry God had prepared for him (Genesis 50 v20).

- ✓ You need to see Him as your HEAVENLY FATHER.

When the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples in Matthew chapter 6 and warned them of some of the possible sources of worry and discouragement they would face, He reminded them that they had a Heavenly Father Who knew their needs and problems (Matthew 6 v32) and cared for them (Matthew 6 v26).

With a sovereign and wise God as a Heavenly Father like this why should you ever be discouraged or depressed? Don't focus on yourself, your problems or on other people. Keep your eyes upon Him!

Day 5

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4 v6).

Your remedy for discouragement is:

- **THINK ABOUT GOD** – and see Him as He really is.
- **TALK TO GOD.**

Instead of talking to others about your discouragements you should talk about them to God. This was what Saul reminded the believers to do in Philippians 4 v6.

If you do this, God’s promise is that you will enjoy His peace as our verse for today tells us. He may not remove the source of discouragement, but He will give you strength to handle it, and a real experience of the peace which only He can give.

- **THROW ONTO GOD** whatever is causing the problem and bringing discouragement.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 5 v7:

“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

You are to do this as a conscious and continuous act. Just as the disciples threw their cloaks on the donkey in Luke 19 v35, you are to throw your cares and discouragements onto your Lord – and then leave them there.

The same word is used in both verses.

As you follow these three steps there will be, at least, four consequences in your life and ministry:

- **Perseverance.** You will not give up. He will help you to keep going. The Lord Jesus said in John 17 v4 *“I have finished the work which You called Me to do.”* And so will you.
- **Patience.** You will pray that God will work and change the situation. But it may not be today; you must learn to be patient (Hebrews 10 v36). He might not change the situation; but, if not, you can pray He will change you!
- **Provision.** God will provide exactly what you need. This was the lesson Paul learned in 2 Corinthians 12 v9. He prayed for the thorn to be taken away but God did not do so. He knew what was best for him. Instead He provided Paul with the grace he needed to handle the situation.
- **Peace.** You will enjoy His peace. This is the second greatest gift the Lord Jesus has for you. When you trusted Him as your Saviour He gave you eternal life (Romans 6 v23). And now as you keep your eyes on Him and put your faith in Him He gives you His Peace.

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14 v27).

Day 6

"Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God" (1 Samuel 30 v6)

We can understand better the causes of discouragement, the consequences of discouragement and the cure for discouragement by looking at several people in the Bible who were discouraged.

David was discouraged in I Samuel chapters 29 and 30.

David and his men had left Israel because of Saul's attempt to capture and kill them, and were now living in the land of the Philistines. During his time there he was "walking on a tightrope". He still fought against the other enemies of Israel but the Philistines thought he was fighting his own people the Israelites. When the Philistines went to fight the Israelites they invited David and his men to go with them – and they agreed to do so. But some of the Philistine leaders objected and the Philistine king sent them back to their city of Ziklag.

However when they got there they found that in their absence the Amalekites had attacked their city and taken away all their women, sons and daughters. We read in 1 Samuel 30 v6 that *"David was greatly distressed."*

The cause of his discouragement

There were a number of relatively minor factors which contributed to his distress and discouragement - the strain of living in the land of the Philistines and the stress of living "a double life". But the two main and obvious factors were:

- The Amalekites' attack on his city and the loss of all the women and children.
- The reaction of David's men. We read in verse 6 that all of them were grieved because they had lost their sons and daughters and they spoke about stoning David. They blamed him and wanted to kill him – and this must have shattered David.

The consequences of his discouragement

David was now in a deep dark valley. He was not just distressed but greatly distressed.

The cure for his discouragement

We read that David reacted to his great discouragement in three ways:

- Our verse for today tells us that *“He encouraged himself in the Lord his God”*. He turned immediately to God and fixed his eyes, his thoughts and his feelings on Him. He probably withdrew to a quiet place of seclusion where he could really focus on God.
- He asked God what he should do. He wanted the divine answer – not a human one.
- When he got the answer he obeyed. He pursued the Amalekites and defeated them.

And the result was – *“David recovered all”* (1 Samuel 30 v19). PRAISE GOD!

Day 7

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12 v9).

Paul was discouraged

Even the great apostle Paul had times when he was discouraged. He writes about one of them in 2 Corinthians 12 v1-10.

The cause of his discouragement

- He was discouraged because he had a *“thorn in the flesh”* (verse 7)
The Bible does not say what this thorn was. It may have been an illness or a bodily weakness of some kind; or it may have been a person who was difficult and was causing problems. We don’t know, but it caused Paul pain and discouragement.
- He was especially discouraged because when he prayed and asked God to remove this thorn, God said “No” – and this happened three times. The *“thorn in his flesh”* was a source of discouragement, but God’s response to his prayer was an even greater discouragement.

The consequences of his discouragement

Paul was, like David, in a deep dark valley.

- *“Why does God not answer my prayers?”*
- *“Why does God not remove the thorn? I could serve Him so much better if I didn’t have it.”*

The cure for his discouragement

But God spoke to Paul in the words of today’s Bible verse and gave him a very special promise:

“My grace is sufficient (enough) for you” (2 Corinthians 12 v9).

God's grace was like an inexhaustible reservoir available to Paul, which would supply all the help and strength he needed to be victorious over his thorn. In addition God made it clear to Paul that this thorn would actually be a means of blessing and encouragement to him, and that through it Paul would know the reality of God's strength and Christ's power in his life and ministry. Many great Christian leaders have had thorns in the flesh which discouraged them:

- John Wesley had a wife who was not in agreement with his ministry and often opposed him.
- Fanny Crosby was blind.
- Charles Spurgeon suffered from gout and severe depression.
- David Brainard had tuberculosis.
- Amy Carmichael was ill and in bed for many years.

But as they kept their eyes on God, and the promise of His sufficient grace, they were enabled to handle or overcome their problem and keep going. And God will do the same for you, in your discouragement, if you keep your eyes on Him.



2 Corinthians 12:9

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Week 22: Theme – Elijah And Discouragement

Day 1

“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word” (1 Kings 17v1).

During this week we will continue to look at those in the Bible who were discouraged. We will concentrate our thoughts on Elijah who is one of the greatest men in the Bible and in the history of the world. He had a powerful ministry, he performed many miracles and he was greatly used and blessed by God. Yet the Bible reminds us that he *“was a man subject to like passions as we are”* (James 5v17). And we will see this week that he was also prone to discouragement and depression as we are! I think we can learn more on this subject from the life and ministry of Elijah than from any other source.

This week we will concentrate on the events in 1 Kings 19 because these are most relevant to our theme of discouragement – the consequences of those events, the causes of the resulting discouragement and then the cure of that discouragement.

Elijah came from the land of Gilead which was “over the river Jordan”. He was a man of humble birth, whose strength and success did not lie in his surroundings, his upbringing, his training or himself – but in God. His name means *“Jehovah my strength”* – and that was true in his life and ministry.

His first appearance was before King Ahab when he announced that there would be no more rain! The events which followed are well known – the ravens at the brook Cherith, the widow woman and her son in Zarephath, Elijah’s meeting with Obadiah, and his return visit to Ahab. Then came the mighty contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel with its magnificent display of God’s presence and power, followed by Elijah’s prayer for rain and God’s answer to that prayer.

Now we come to chapter 19 and in this chapter and those following we see the three main characters in the story:

- Ahab, the king, sensual and materialistic. He was most interested in food and drink, horses and vineyards – and very much under the influence and control of his wife.
- Jezebel, the queen, crafty, evil, unscrupulous and “religious”. Her deliberate purpose was to encourage the worship of Baal and eliminate the worship of Jehovah.
- Elijah the prophet – God’s man for a dark day – rugged, passionate, gifted, consecrated, bold – and yet a man like ourselves, and prone to discouragement.

Day 2

“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!” (1 Kings 19 v4).

Elijah had just witnessed and experienced two of the greatest manifestations of God’s power ever seen:

- He had witnessed God’s power in burning up the sacrifice on Mount Carmel.
- He had seen how God had sent the rain in answer to prayer.

What victories! What a time for rejoicing and celebration! These were two of the greatest miracles ever witnessed.

But what happens?

Jezebel acted immediately. She probably knew that she couldn’t touch Elijah. So she sent word that she would have him killed on the next day hoping that he would be afraid and would flee.

And that is exactly what happened. Instead of sending a message back to her to say that he feared nothing except sin, he “ran for his life” to Beersheba and for the first time he moved out of God’s will.

And so we see this great man of God fearing the queen and fleeing. He has failed! How sad!

And yet how comforting it is for us, who also know what it means to fail, to realise that even this great man of God could experience failures, and become discouraged, depressed and even suicidal.

We can see the CONSEQUENCES of Elijah’s flight and failure:

- He was gripped by fear (verse 3)
- He could not even bear the presence of his servant and left him in Beersheba (verse 3).

- He went a further day's journey into the wilderness and sat down on his own under a juniper tree (verse 4), overwhelmed with depression and despair, as our verse tells us.
- He unwisely asked God to take away his life (verse 4).
- He felt that he was no good – and could not compare with other men of God (verse 4).

What a picture of discouragement! It would almost seem that he had temporarily lost his trust in God. Things had certainly not worked out as he had expected. He seemed to have “hit rock bottom”.

Have you ever been in this position? Could this also be a picture of you? Have you ever experienced discouragement and depression like Elijah? Is there something which God wants to deal with in your life – as He planned to do in the life of Elijah? Later in the week we will see how He did this– and how He also wants to help you.

Day 3

“So he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life” (1 Kings 19 v10).

Before going any further we need to stop and ask ourselves some questions. Why did this happen? What were the CAUSES of his failure and his discouragement? How was it possible for a man like Elijah to become so depressed and discouraged – especially after what he had seen and experienced on Mount Carmel? Could it have been avoided? Or was it inevitable?

As we try to answer these questions concerning Elijah we also need to apply them to ourselves so that we can avoid the type of discouragement Elijah faced – and know how to handle it when it comes:

- Elijah could well have expected that, after the great display of God's power on Mount Carmel, and the wonderful way God had sent the rain in answer to his prayer, that victory had been completely won over evil, false religion and the wickedness of Jezebel and Ahab. But this hostile message from Jezebel (verse 2) who was seeking his life was a terrible anticlimax, and a great disappointment.
- Is it not true that we have often had the same experience? We have “won a battle”; we have seen God at work and are thrilled and excited. Then comes opposition and we fall into deep depression.

- He felt very alone and isolated as our Bible verse tells us, and, in addition, he was disappointed with the lack of response from God's people. He could have expected more support from them – and it did not seem to be forthcoming.
This is a common experience for us, is it not? We work long and hard and seem to get little encouragement or support. We are indeed tempted to become discouraged.
- He was tired and exhausted. The contest on Mount Carmel must have put him under considerable strain. Then he ran from Mount Carmel to Jezreel and on to Beersheba. From there he went a further day's journey into the desert. As a result of all this he was worn out.
There is no doubt that if we do not look after our bodies and emotions properly we run the risk of "burn out" – and the resulting physical and emotional problems can certainly cause or lead to spiritual problems.
- Above all, he had taken his eyes off God. He was only seeing with his natural eyes and thinking with his natural thoughts. He was not seeing and thinking spiritually – and he had temporarily stopped trusting God.
Discouragement comes when we fix our eyes on the problem and not on God. Are you discouraged? Is this the reason? Then get your eyes on God and not on yourself, or your problem.

Day 4

"And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (1 Kings 19 v9).

And so as we look at Elijah in 1 Kings 19 we see a picture of discouragement:

- Are you ever discouraged, depressed and despondent?
- Do fears and doubts ever possess you?
- Do you ever experience loneliness and a feeling that nobody understands?
- Do you ever feel that you can't go on?

Then you need to see and understand the CURE for discouragement, how God dealt with His servant and how He will also help you deal with your discouragement:

- Notice, first of all, that God did not scold or rebuke Elijah. He loved him and understood all the difficulties and problems he had been facing. God's goal was to restore him, not blame him.
And the same is true for us – God wants to restore us – not rebuke us.

- God manifested His care and love to Elijah in several kind ways.
 - ✓ He allowed him to have a good sleep. That was the first thing he needed.
 - ✓ An angel prepared a meal for him.
 - ✓ An angel touched him – to waken him and give him food.
 - ✓ He slept again.
 - ✓ The angel touched him again and gave him another very special meal which was to give him enough strength for his long journey to Horeb.
- After he had rested and was refreshed Elijah was ready to go to Horeb where he would have a personal meeting with God and a recommissioning from God.
- It could well be that the answer to your depression and discouragement is that God wants you to have a rest - more sleep and proper meals! Physical needs do not need spiritual remedies; they need physical and common sense remedies. Healing often begins by having rest, food and change. We must not neglect those ministries if we are to be spiritually, mentally and physically healthy.
- God met with Elijah at Mount Horeb and spoke to him. His physical needs had been met, but the spiritual problem was still there. He could not understand why his mountain top experience had proved to be so fruitless. But Elijah got the answer, for our verse says the Word of the Lord came to Elijah. And that is still how God deals with our problems – through His Word:
 - ✓ First of all God asked him a question “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*”? God wanted Elijah to examine himself and what he was doing and He wanted a frank answer. We will look at his answer tomorrow, but we must see our own need to be open and honest with God. He knows our problems but He wants us to share them with Him.

Day 5

“And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice” (1 Kings 19 v12).

Elijah’s answer to God’s question, “What are you doing here?” was open, honest and frank.

- It consisted of four main parts:
 - ✓ He began by stating the main goal of his life and ministry. He emphasized his jealousy for God and his desire that the people of God serve Him and Him alone.

- ✓ He continued by expressing his disappointment that despite all that had happened they were not doing this.
- ✓ He complained that he was the only one now who served the Lord.
- ✓ He expressed his fear that they would kill him.
- God spoke again and told him to go up to the top of the mountain.
- God then taught Elijah a lesson – through the events which followed and which are outlined in our verse. He felt and saw:
 - ✓ A strong wind
 - ✓ An earthquake
 - ✓ A fire

But God was not in any of them.

Elijah's fiery nature may well have responded to these tremendous manifestations. But he had to learn that God's greatest manifestations come to us in quietness.

- ✓ A still small voice followed – and God was in it.

Elijah needed to learn, and we need to learn, that the work of God, whether in an individual life or in the church is not usually spectacular (although the spectacular can occur). It is usually one of quiet growth. God is sovereign and He does not always work in the way we think or feel He should work.
- God repeated His first question and Elijah gave the same answer. Elijah's problem was not yet solved. So God does three things:
 - ✓ Firstly, He recommissioned Elijah to His service, knowing that getting involved with his ministry again, in the proper way, would deal eventually with his discouragement.

Inactivity is not the answer to discouragement. Giving up and quitting doesn't solve the problem but only aggravates it.

Hearing God's still small voice from His Word, and knowing that this is the work He wants us to do, we should then make a new start and trust that God will bless what we are doing in a new way. And He will if this is what He wants us to do.

We will see the next two things which God did tomorrow – as He continues to minister to Elijah and his discouragement.

Day 6

"Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19 v18).

✓ Secondly, when God recommissioned Elijah He asked him to perform two tasks:

- He should anoint Hazael to be king of Syria and Jehu to be king of Israel. Both of these kings would cause serious problems and be "rods of chastisement" to Ahab and his people.
- He should anoint Elisha to be his successor. Elijah's work was not yet finished but Elisha was to be his understudy, and go through a process of preparation so that he could eventually take over.

Elijah now knew that God would punish the ungodly and he also knew that there was someone who would carry on this ministry.

✓ And then thirdly God gave Elijah a wonderful word of encouragement. He told him that he was not alone and there were seven thousand others in Israel who served Him and not Baal.

Elijah then departed and continued with his ministry. His natural vitality and vigour had been restored by the food and rest; his fretted and worried spirit had been quieted in the stillness; and he had learned the lesson that God more often works in a quiet rather than in a spectacular way. The pressure of his problems was released, he now had the knowledge that God would judge those who had disobeyed Him, and he had the assurance that there were others who loved the Lord. He also realised that God had provided someone to carry on his work after he was gone.

So his healing was complete, the discouragement was gone; and he was able to enter a new phase in his ministry.

That same renewal and new beginning is available for you and me also. Have you learned the lessons Elijah learned?

- You need to take time to rest and eat proper meals.
- You need to spend time in the stillness with God.
- You need to realise that God often works in ways we don't understand, and that His work is often quiet and gradual rather than sudden and spectacular.
- You need to understand that God is just and that He will deal with those who oppose Him and His will. That is not our responsibility.
- You need to appreciate the fact that you are not alone. There are others who share the same burdens and zeal as you do.

- You need to trust God for those who will carry on your ministry after you are gone.

If you and I have learned these lessons, we can leave discouragement behind and make a new beginning in our lives and in our ministries. God will bless us and use us in a new way in the work He has called us to do; and we will also enjoy better health!

Day 7

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Psalm 42 v11).

We will conclude our meditations on discouragement which we have shared over these last two weeks with a brief study of Psalms 42 and 43. It is interesting that today's verse is repeated almost word for word three times in these psalms. So the Holy Spirit wants to bring it to our attention.

The psalmist's situation

He was in a deep pit of depression and discouragement:

- His tears in Psalm 42 v3 were one evidence of this discouragement.
- His questions were another evidence:
 - ✓ Where is God? (42 v3).
 - ✓ Why have You forgotten me? (42 v9).
 - ✓ Why have You cast me off (43 v2)

As a result the psalmist cried out *“my soul is cast down within me”* (42 v6).

Are you in a situation similar to that of the Psalmist? Have you ever asked questions like these? Is your “soul cast down within you?” Are you discouraged?

The psalmist's solution

You and I need to see how the psalmist dealt with his discouragement:

- He talked to himself (and he did this three times)
“Why are you cast down, O my soul?” (42 v5, 11; 43 v5).
 There are times when we need to talk to ourselves firmly and directly, rebuke ourselves, and tell ourselves how silly it is to be discouraged when there is so much to encourage us.
- He talked to God
 In 42 v6 he unburdened himself to God and told Him how discouraged he was and he asked God for His light and His truth (43 v3).
 This is the logical thing for us to do also. Tell God all about it. He wants to hear from us what is wrong and how we feel.

- He focused on God
He told himself to *"hope in God"*. That is where the answer to discouragement lies.
We need to get our eyes on God – not on ourselves, not on other people, and not on the problems we have. The more we focus on Him the less we will be discouraged.
- He praised God for His help (4 v5, 11; 43 v4, 5).
He did this even before his discouragement lifted. And as He focused on God and praised Him God gave him *"songs in the night"* (42 v8) and *"exceeding joy"* (43 v4).

And God will restore to us our *"songs in the night"*, and our *"exceeding joy"* in Him, as we rebuke ourselves, talk to God and focus on Him.



Psalm 42:11

*Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me? Hope
in God; For I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God."*

Week 23:

Theme – Our “So Great Salvation”

Day 1

“Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2 v14).

Our theme this week is one of the greatest and most thrilling of all themes – and one to which I have returned, time and time again, in both my preaching and my writing.

When I was a young Christian I knew that I was saved – saved especially from the punishment of sin, and I knew that all my sins had been forgiven. But I did not see or realize how great my salvation was. I have since come to see that salvation is much more than just forgiveness and that it includes many special and wonderful truths – and we are going to look at all these wonderful constituent parts of our salvation this week. And I trust that each day, and especially at the end of the week we will be really thankful for our salvation – and all the wonderful benefits it has brought to us.

Our Need of Salvation

But let us, today, just remind ourselves of three biblical truths.

- Firstly, the Bible teaches us that every man, woman, boy and girl born into the world are separated from God and need to be saved:
 - ✓ We are, by nature, spiritually dead (Ephesians 2 v1, 5).
 - ✓ We are spiritually blind (2 Corinthians 4 v4).
 - ✓ We are controlled by sin (Colossians 1 v13).
 - ✓ We are enemies of God (Romans 5 v10; 8 v7, 8).

And because of these facts the Bible teaches us that all of us have two basic needs:

- ✓ All our sins need to be forgiven (Acts 2 v38; 13 v38).
 - ✓ We, ourselves, need to be changed (John 3 v5, 7).
- Secondly, the Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world firstly to take the punishment for our sins, and secondly to change us – and we can see these two purposes of the death of the Lord

Jesus in our Bible verse for today. He came and died and gave Himself for us – to redeem us (firstly) and also (secondly) to purify us.

➤ Thirdly, the Bible teaches us that this salvation is for everyone and anyone who will repent and believe:

- ✓ In repentance the sinner turns away from sin in his heart (Acts 3 v19).
- ✓ In faith the sinner turns to Christ and puts his trust in Him (Acts 16 v31).

And the result is – conversion. The sinner who turns from his sin and puts his trust in Jesus Christ is – SAVED.

Are you sure that you are saved? Have you turned from your sin? Have you trusted Jesus Christ? If not – do so! If you have – thank Him for your so great salvation.

Day 2

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5 v1).

This week we are thinking about our *"so great salvation"* (Hebrews 2 v3), and especially trying to understand the wonderful results of that salvation.

We Are Justified

The first, and perhaps the most important result of salvation, is that we are JUSTIFIED.

What does this mean? What is justification?

"Justification is that legal act of God whereby He declares that the sinner who has trusted Christ is free from guilt and punishment and that he has a new standing or position of righteousness before Him."

Justification has two results for the sinner who has trusted Jesus Christ:

- God forgives all his sin – past, present and future (Acts 13 v38, 39; Romans 5 v1).
He will never be condemned or separated from God (Romans 8 v1; 33-39).
- God sees him in Christ and as pure and as righteous as Christ is (2 Corinthians 5 v21; Philippians 3 v9). God imputes the righteousness of Christ to him (Romans 4 v8, 11, 23-25) and he is completely righteous in God's sight (Romans 3 v22-26).

Justification, this aspect of salvation, does not change the character or condition of the sinner. It is a legal declaration. Justification changes the sinner's position before God. Our verse for today tells us that because of what Jesus Christ has

done, when we believe we now have peace with God and are in a new relationship with Him. Justification is external and not internal. But it is absolutely necessary because it deals with our first and main problem. It forgives all my sin and reconciles me to God. Without justification I would be separated from a holy God forever because of my sin; but now, because the righteousness of Christ has, through justification, been imputed to me, or put into my account, God sees me clothed with the righteousness of Christ – and on that basis I am justified! Our verse for today tells us that because of what Jesus Christ has done, when we believe we now have peace with God. We are justified and we are in a new relationship with God.

But as a Christian I still sin and when I do I can lose my joy and fellowship with God is broken. I need then to ask God my Father to forgive these temporal family sins (1 John 1 v9) so that my joy and fellowship be restored. But this restoration does not affect my justification, which is the eternal, judicial forgiveness of my sin by God the Judge. This happened only once when I trusted Christ and it is final, complete and irreversible.

Day 3

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3 v5).

When we trust Jesus Christ we are justified once and for all. Our position is now changed because the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us and God sees us as pure as His Son.

But justification is only one part of our great salvation. We need not only a change in our **position** before God which is external – but we also need a change in our **condition** which is internal. We ourselves need to be changed – and Jesus Christ our Saviour also does that when we trust Him. That change is known as regeneration – the new birth.

We Are Regenerated

Our “so great salvation” is all-encompassing. It meets all our needs. And one of our greatest needs is to be changed inside – to have a new nature – to become a new person. And our verse for today tells us we are saved by God’s mercy – and through regeneration. What is regeneration?

“Regeneration is that act of God by which He makes dead sinners alive (Ephesians 2 v1, 5; John 3 v16) – and gives them a new nature” (2 Corinthians 5 v17).

The Bible tells us a number of facts or truths about regeneration:

- It is necessary and without it no one can enter Heaven (John 3 v3-5).
- It is a birth, a second birth (John 3 v3). This means that, as in an ordinary birth, there will be a process leading up to it, but that the birth itself takes place at one moment of time. Some people can identify that exact moment; others cannot. But the exact time it happened is not important – so long as we know it did happen.
- It is the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3 v8; Titus 3 v5; James 1 v18), the One sent into the world by the Lord Jesus (John 16 v7-11) to apply His work of salvation to sinners.
- The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to regenerate us (James 1 v18; 1 Peter 1 v23).
- We are regenerated the moment we receive or trust Jesus Christ as our Saviour and as a result of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts (John 1 v12, 13).

But what we especially need to remember is that our justification and our regeneration, while their results are different, both happen at the same time – at the moment the sinner puts his faith in Jesus Christ.

And because regeneration involves a new life and a new nature it should produce evidence. If a person is born again he will be a new creation (2 Corinthians 5 v17) and there will be a clear change in his life. He will not be perfect – indeed far from it – but he will be changed. If there is no change, there is no regeneration and if there is no regeneration there is no justification. And James makes that very clear in James 2 verses 17-26.

I trust that there is such evidence in all of our lives.

Day 4

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” (Romans 8 v15).

Justification and regeneration. A new position and a new person. What a wonderful salvation. But there is more. We are not only justified and regenerated; we are also adopted!

We Are Adopted

Adoption means *“the placing of a son”*.

“Adoption is that legal and judicial act of God whereby He places the sinner who trusts Jesus Christ into His family and makes him His child. And, not only that, at the same time He advances him and gives him the privilege of being an adult son.”

This, therefore, happens at exactly the same time as our justification and our regeneration, and is another vital and important part of our salvation. Indeed, the well known theologian, Dr. J I Packer states in one of his books that he believes adoption to be the greatest blessing and result of salvation.

And the greatest blessing of adoption, as our verse for today tells us, is that we can now call God – “Our Father”, and that we are not only His sons and daughters; we are also His heirs:

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4 v4-7).

And what are the results?

- Now that God is my Father and I am His heir, I can:
 - ✓ come to Him at any time (Matthew 7 v7-11; Ephesians 2 v18)
 - ✓ talk to Him (Matthew 6 v9)
 - ✓ listen to Him (Ephesians 1 v17, 18)
 - ✓ trust Him for everything (Matthew 6 v26, 32)
- Now that God is my Father, He will:
 - ✓ listen to me (1 John 5 v14, 15)
 - ✓ care for me (Luke 12 v27-32)
 - ✓ chasten me if necessary (Hebrews 12 v5-11)
 - ✓ supply all my need (Matthew 6 v8)
- Now that God is my Father, I have:
 - ✓ the family name (1 John 3 v1).
 - ✓ the family likeness (Matthew 5 v44-48; Romans 8 v29)..
 - ✓ many brothers and sisters (1 John 1 v3; 3 v14).
 - ✓ family love (John 17 v24-26).
- Because God is my Father I want to please Him at all times (Matthew 6 v1, 6, 18).

What a tremendous truth! What a wonderful salvation!

Do you really appreciate the fact that you are God's child and God's heir?

Day 5

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6 v19).

At the very moment we trust Jesus Christ as our Saviour we have seen that three results occur:

- We are justified – we have a new position.
- We are regenerated – we are new people and have new life.
- We are adopted – we have a new Father and are in a new family.

But that's not all.

We Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit

One of the greatest truths and results of salvation is that at the moment we trust Jesus Christ as our Saviour, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us – and we receive a new power to live the way God wants us to live.

The Bible teaches us that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who comes to live in us the moment we are saved – and not, as some people believe, as a second experience some time after the moment of our salvation:

- Many verses throughout the Epistles teach that all believers have received (past tense) the Holy Spirit (Romans 5 v5; Romans 8 v11; 1 Corinthians 6 v19; Galatians 3 v2 and 4 v6; 1 John 2 v27 and 3 v24).
- The Lord Jesus taught that those who would believe on Him would receive the Holy Spirit (John 7 v39).
- Peter told his unbelieving audience that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit if they would repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2 v38).
- Paul taught that if a person was not indwelt by the Holy Spirit he was not a Christian (Romans 8 v9).

Do we who have trusted Christ really believe and understand that the Holy Spirit lives in us? If we do there can, and should, be two consequences in our lives today:

- He will give us the power we need to overcome sin and also to witness for Him
"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1 v8).
- His presence within us will encourage us to keep our bodies pure and holy. Paul wrote our verse for today to a church with many problems; and he

told them that their bodies were the temple or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. If they really believed this, they would be careful to keep their bodies clean and holy (because of Who lived there); and so should we.

Day 6

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12 v13).

When the Lord Jesus saved us He had thought of everything; He understood all we needed for our new lives – a new POSITION, a new CHARACTER, and a new FATHER – and as, we saw yesterday, a new POWER.

One of the clearest and best pictures of the relationship between Jesus Christ and those who trust Him as their Saviour is the picture of a body and its head. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the Head, and all believers constitute His body – which is the church (Ephesians 1 v21, 22; 5 v23-32; 1 Corinthians 12 v12-27).

We Are Baptized with the Spirit

What a privilege to be a part, a member of this body, the church, the “mystical” body of the Lord Jesus Christ! But you and I are part of it if we are saved.

- When did we become members of His body? The moment we were saved. We were born “*in Adam*” (1 Corinthians 15 v22) but when we trusted Christ we were no longer there, we were now “*in Christ*” (Ephesians 1 v5, 6, 12, 13).
- How did we become members of His body? Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Our verse for today tells us that we were baptized into His body by the Holy Spirit. So “*the baptism of the Holy Spirit is that act of God which baptizes or places the sinner who believes into the body of Christ at the moment of his conversion.*”
- Who is baptized with the Holy Spirit? Our verse tells us that this has happened to all believers; and that it is not a special experience enjoyed by some believers.

Do you realize the great privilege it is to be part of the body of Christ; and did you understand that this was part of the salvation you received when you trusted Jesus Christ?

We Are Sealed by the Spirit

And did you know also that something else happened to you when you were saved? You were sealed by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1 v22; 5 v5; Ephesians 1 v14; 4 v30).

"The sealing with the Spirit is that act of God whereby He puts His mark or seal upon the person who believes – at the moment of his conversion – and that seal is the Holy Spirit Himself."

- A seal is a mark of ownership.
- A seal is a means of security.
- A seal shows that the transaction is finished.

And therefore the sealing of the Holy Spirit shows we belong to Jesus Christ, that we are secure and that our salvation is complete.

What a wonderful salvation!

Day 7

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3 v16).

During this week we have seen how wonderful and how glorious our salvation is. When we trusted Jesus Christ as our Saviour a number of very special things happened to us – right at that very moment:

- We were justified – all our sin was forgiven.
- We were regenerated – we became "new creatures".
- We received the rights and privileges of adoption – and God became our Heavenly Father.
- The Holy Spirit came to live in us.
- We were baptized with the Holy Spirit into the Body of Jesus Christ.
- We were sealed by the Holy Spirit and are therefore completely secure.

But that's not all.

The Bible tells us in three separate places that when we trusted Jesus Christ as our Saviour we were given the Holy Spirit *"as an earnest"*:

"Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as an earnest (or guarantee)" (2 Corinthians 1 v22).

"Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as an earnest (or guarantee)" (2 Corinthians 5 v5).

"You were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise Who is the earnest (or guarantee) of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1 v13b and 14a).

We don't use the word "earnest" much today. It means "a deposit" or "a guarantee". Jesus Christ gives those who trust Him the Holy Spirit as the guarantee that one day our salvation will be complete – *"until the redemption of the purchased possession"* (Ephesians 1 v14b). The wonderful earnest whom we received is not only a special aspect of our salvation but it is a further evidence of our security.

Is it any wonder that the writer to the Hebrews described all of this in chapter 2 v3 as *"so great salvation"* – and so it is.

But there is another aspect and ingredient of our *"so great salvation"* which we have not yet mentioned. Can you guess what it is from our verse for today?

When the seventy disciples returned from the period of ministry to which the Lord Jesus had sent them (Luke 10 v1), they were so happy (Luke 10 v17) because God had blessed their ministry in a wonderful way. But the Lord Jesus reminded them that the greatest source of joy was that their *"names were written in Heaven"* (Luke 10 v20). Perhaps the greatest source of joy for you and me today, and perhaps the aspect of salvation which thrills us most, is that we have eternal life, as our verse for today tells us. Our names are written in Heaven. The moment we trusted Jesus Christ as our Saviour we received eternal life – and the promise of the Lord Jesus in John 10 v28 *"I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish."* What a promise! What a wonderful truth. Our bodies will die (unless the Lord Jesus comes back before then) but the "real you", our souls and spirits will not die – but will go to be with the Lord until the resurrection, and until our bodies are raised again from the dead, incorruptible, and then reunited for ever with our souls.

"Thank You, Lord Jesus, for dying for us on the Cross and for providing us with such a wonderful, glorious – and so great salvation."



Hebrews 2:3

"... how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation."

Week 24: Theme – The Names of God

Day 1

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9 v6).

Our names are very important to us, aren't they? We like people to remember our name and use it when they meet and talk with us; and we don't like it when people forget our name!

In the Bible names are very important because they often had a meaning and were sometimes a description of a person's character. Abraham and Sarah called their son “Isaac” because his name meant “laughter” which expressed their joy at his birth. When Simon became a disciple of the Lord Jesus, He gave him a new name – Peter, meaning a stone or rock – because he was to become so strong in his work for his Lord. And, most important of all, when the Son of God was born into this world He was called Jesus. Why? Because Jesus means “Saviour” or “God saves” and that was why He came to our world.

Each day this week we are going to meditate on the One, the Great One, Who created the heavens and the earth. What is His name? The Bible calls Him God. The name “God” is a general name which is used many times in the Bible. In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, it is a very short name and a word which is easy to remember – EL; but, more often, another version of the word is used – ELOHIM; and it is significant that this word or name occurs almost 3,000 times in the Old Testament. It is interesting also that the word ELOHIM is in the plural and is used with a singular verb. This certainly implies that God is a Trinity. In our verse for today five names are given to the Lord Jesus, the Son of God and the third of those names is ELOHIM.

What does the word EL or ELOHIM mean? It means “The Mighty One”, “The Strong One”. “The Powerful One” – and it is especially used to describe the great power of God:

- His power in creation
“In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1 v1).
- His power in deliverance

*"God (Elohim) brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox."
(Numbers 23 v22).*

- His power to comfort His people:

"Comfort, you, comfort My people!" Says your God" (Elohim) (Isaiah 40 v1).

- His power to keep covenant with His people:

"And he said: 'LORD God of Israel, there is no God (Elohim) in heaven above or on earth below like You, Who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts'" (1 Kings 8 v23).

And as we think of this wonderful name and the power represented by that name we can say in the words of the Psalmist:

"He is my refuge and my fortress; my God (Elohim); in Him will I trust" (Psalm 91 v2).

Day 2

"I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 42 v8a).

Yesterday we saw that God has revealed Himself by the name EL or ELOHIM – the almighty powerful One.

But God has many other names – and we will look at a different one each day this week.

When God called Moses and told him to go to Egypt, he had many doubts and questions which caused him to hesitate. One of the questions he addressed to God was "What is Your Name? If people ask me Who has sent me and I reply that You have, they will probably ask me for Your Name, and I don't know it" (Exodus 3 v13).

At that moment God told Moses His Name – His very special name, because it is used more often than any other of God's Names in the Old Testament – almost 7,000 times. God said to Moses that His Name was YHWH which is pronounced YAHWEH in Hebrew and JEHOVAH in English. Usually in our English Bibles it is written not as JEHOVAH but as LORD using capital letters. What does this name mean? God explained it to Moses (Exodus 3 v14). It means "I am that I am" or "I will be that I will be." It means that God, JEHOVAH, is the eternal One – the One Who always is, the One Who is always present and always there. "Tell the children of Israel," said God to Moses that "I AM has sent me to you."

And God says later to His prophet Isaiah in the words of our verse for today "I AM the Lord (JEHOVAH) that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another." And this wonderful name – I AM – shows us that God never changes. He is always "I AM". And His Word never changes. So we can trust Him completely.

The theologians point out that ELOHIM is the general name of God used especially in connection with His power in the creation and preservation of the world. But as JEHOVAH He is the God of revelation Who expresses Himself in His essential moral and spiritual attributes. And He is, as JEHOVAH, especially the God of revelation to Israel.

As JEHOVAH therefore God reveals Himself as a God of holiness (Leviticus 19 v2), righteousness (Psalm 11 v7) and love (Jeremiah 31 v3).

It is important at this point to remember how often the Lord Jesus used the words "I AM" – the name of JEHOVAH God – with reference to Himself when He was here on earth.

We remember how, in the garden of Gethsemane, when the soldiers told Him they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth (John 18 v5) He replied with the words "I AM" (the word "he" is not part of the original text). And the soldiers all fell backward. Why? Because the Lord Jesus had used the special Name of JEHOVAH God – the great I AM, with regard to Himself.

And over and over again the Lord Jesus used these same two words. He said, *"I am the bread of life; the light of the world; the door; the resurrection and the life; the way the truth and the life; and the true vine."*

Today we bow down before our JEHOVAH God. That is His Name, His special Name – the God Who never changes – and we worship Him.

Day 3

"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4 v19).

The two main names of God in the Old Testament are ELOHIM and JEHOVAH. The name ELOHIM reminds us that He is powerful and that this power is demonstrated in His works. And the name JEHOVAH reveals to us His holiness, righteousness and love.

There are many other names of God in the Bible. For example the name ADONAI occurs 300 times in the Old Testament and is translated into English by the word "Lord" in small letters (not capitals) and it is a name which emphasizes ownership and mastership. Then there is the name EL SHADDAI which occurs almost 50 times and enlarges the word EL (for God) to include the word SHADDAI which means Almighty – especially emphasizing the might and power of God. But during the rest of this week we will look at a number of God's Names which include and are an enlargement of His main and special Name – JEHOVAH.

Each time this special name of God is joined to a second name – each of which teaches us a wonderful truth about God.

Jehovah Jireh

This divine name is only used once in the Bible in Genesis 22 v1-19 and explains what it means.

So let us look first of all at the story.

Abraham loved his only son Isaac very much and it was a real shock to him when God told him to take his son to the land of Moriah and offer him up as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed God's command and started on his journey to Mount Moriah. As he and Isaac were ascending the mountain Isaac said to his father, *"Father we have the fire and the wood for the sacrifice, but where is the lamb?"* Abraham answered him briefly *"GOD WILL PROVIDE Himself a lamb for a burnt offering."* God will give us what we need.

When they got to the top of the mountain Abraham placed his son on the altar and was going to kill him when an angel appeared and stopped him from doing so. Then Abraham saw a ram nearby and he killed it and offered it up in the place of Isaac. God had solved the problem; He had supplied the sacrifice; he had provided (as Abraham had said to his son). And Abraham called that place JEHOVAH JIREH – which means GOD WILL PROVIDE.

Our JEHOVAH God is a God Who provides – and Who delights to do so. He gives us all we need.

But God's greatest provision of all took place at the dawn of the first century – and this record of Abraham and Isaac is a picture of that great provision:

- Isaac on the altar and condemned to death is a picture of us. We are condemned because of our sin.
- Abraham, the one who was to execute that condemnation, is a picture of God the Father Who must punish us because of our sin.
- The ram is a picture of the Lord Jesus, God the Son, Who took our place "on the altar" and was punished by His Father for our sin (John 1 v29).

JEHOVAH JIREH – God provided His Son as our Substitute, and through Him and His death has PROVIDED us with salvation.

And He promises to PROVIDE or supply all we need as our verse for today reminds us.

Day 4

“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption”
(1 Corinthians 1 v30).

We are so thankful that our JEHOVAH GOD is a God Who provides. He is JEHOVAH JIREH – and He has provided us with a Saviour Who died for us and took the punishment for our sins. What happens when we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour? God’s next name gives the answer.

Jehovah Tsidkenu

The prophet Jeremiah wrote two books in the Old Testament. In the first of these books – the book of Jeremiah – he prophesied that one day in the future a very special king who was pure and righteous would come to our earth and rule justly.

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth” (Jeremiah 23 v5).

He was speaking about the Lord Jesus. And then he gave the One Who was to come a special name – JEHOVAH TSIDKENU - which means “Jehovah our righteousness”:

“In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23 v6).

This name tells us that God is righteous and pure, and also that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God Who would come, is righteous and pure. But it tells us more than that. He is OUR righteousness as we can see in today’s verse (1 Corinthians 1 v30). We can become righteous and pure through Him. What does that mean? There are two answers:

- When the Lord Jesus died on the Cross He not only took all my sin upon Himself but His Father punished Him in my place (1 Peter 3 v18; 2 Corinthians 5 v21). When I trusted the Lord Jesus as my Saviour, His righteousness was imputed to me, I was “clothed” in the “garments” of His righteousness, and from that moment on God sees me as righteous as His son Jesus Christ is righteous; completely perfect; sinless; pure and clean. And that righteousness became mine in God’s sight when I trusted Him (Romans 5 v19). JEHOVAH TSIDKENU – He is my righteousness before His Father.
- But, secondly, the Lord Jesus did not only die on the Cross to make us righteous in our position before God, but He also died to make us righteous

in our person, in our character, in ourselves. He set our feet on the path of righteousness. We are to put on the new man which is created in righteousness (Ephesians 4 v24) and being made free from sin we have become the servants of righteousness (Romans 6 v18). He has become our righteousness in our daily lives and is helping us to live the kind of righteous lives He wants us to live.

Today let us thank the Lord Jesus, firstly, for the righteousness He has imputed to us – once and for all; and then, at the same time, ask Him to impart righteousness to us in our lives every day.

Day 5

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4 v7).

We have a wonderful Saviour God – and a wonderful salvation:

- JEHOVAH JIREH provided that salvation for us through His death.
- JEHOVAH TSIDKENU imputed His righteousness to us when we trusted Jesus Christ – and all our sin was forgiven.

These are two of God's wonderful names. And we see another one today.

Jehovah Shalom

This wonderful name of Jehovah God is found in Judges 6 v24.

The land of Israel had been conquered by the Midianites, so the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, unto JEHOVAH. God chose a man to lead the children of Israel against the Midianites and defeat them. His name was Gideon. But Gideon was not a soldier or a leader; he was a farmer's boy. When the angel told Gideon what he was to do, he said, “That's impossible. I could never do that” (Judges 6 v15). But the Lord assured him that He would be with him and enable him to do what He had asked him to do. So Gideon built an altar unto the Lord (Judges 6 v24) – and called it JEHOVAH SHALOM – or JEHOVAH God our peace. That's what the word “Shalom” means – peace. Gideon now had peace concerning what God had asked him to do – and he went ahead and did it – and defeated the Midianites.

And JEHOVAH God is our shalom, our peace today, in three ways:

- GOD IS PEACE. He is a God of peace; He is never discouraged or depressed; He is never anxious or worried. He is at peace at all times.

“The God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4 v9b).

And Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9 v6).

- GOD HAS MADE PEACE. Mankind were enemies of God separated from Him by a barrier of sin.

But Jesus Christ came to this earth to remove this barrier and make peace between God and man – so that we could be reconciled to God. He took the punishment for our sin and made it possible for us to be reconciled to God and have PEACE WITH GOD.

“And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1 v20). Are you at peace with God?

- GOD GIVES PEACE. But God has not only made peace available to unbelievers – peace with God. He also wants to give peace to believers as a daily experience. This is called THE PEACE OF GOD in our verse for today. And this is the special gift the Lord Jesus has for us.

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14 v27).

Do you have this wonderful peace of God in your heart which our verse for today speaks about? You can – because our God is JEHOVAH SHALOM.

Day 6

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10 v11).

Jehovah God is a God Who provides. He is our righteousness and He is our peace. He is JEHOVAH JIREH, JEHOVAH TSIDKENU and JEHOVAH SHALOM. He gives us all we need, He gives us His righteousness and He gives us His peace.

But our JEHOVAH God has another wonderful Name.

Jehovah Rohi

David was one of the most powerful kings who ever lived and he ruled Israel for many years. But he had not always been a king. When he was a teenager he looked after his father’s sheep out in the desert. He was often alone with his sheep and he often sang and played the harp. He had loved God since he was a child and when he was a shepherd he spent much time talking to Him. He also wrote many beautiful psalms about God and his relationship to Him. And of course the best known and most famous of these is the 23rd psalm which starts with the words *“The Lord (Jehovah) is my Shepherd (Rohi) I shall not want.”*

JEHOVAH ROHI is one of God's Names – JEHOVAH OUR SHEPHERD. Sheep are silly animals and because they wander away they really need a shepherd who loves them and looks after them all the time. And we are like sheep (Isaiah 53 v6), we wander away and we need someone to love us and look after us. That Someone is JEHOVAH ROHI - our Shepherd. And David explains in Psalm 23 how He looks after us:

- He makes sure that we lack nothing (verse 1).
- He gives us rest and guidance (verse 2).
- He restores us when we fall and shows us the right way to go (verse 3).
- He is with us in times of trouble and darkness (verse 4).
- He provides us with all we need (verse 5).
- He gives us His promise that we will be with Him forever (verse 6).

One of the most wonderful chapters in the Bible is Isaiah chapter 40. The main theme of this chapter is the greatness, the majesty and the sovereignty of God. "Behold your God" Isaiah writes in verse 9 and 10. Look at His great works (verse 12), think of His great knowledge (verses 13, 14), look at His supremacy over all rulers and nations (v15, 17, 22a, 23), think about how He created the world (v22b, 26), think of His great strength and power (v 28-31). Words almost fail the prophet as he describes the greatness and power of God.

And yet right in the middle of all those wonderful verses and truths we read: *"He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young"* (Isaiah 40 v11). He is JEHOVAH ROHI – our wonderful Shepherd.

And when the Lord Jesus was here on earth He used this name for Himself – as we see in our verse for today. He is JEHOVAH ROHI. He finds us when we are astray and lost and brings us home (Matthew 18 v10-12), He leads us (John 10 v3, 4), He gave His life for us (John 10 v11). He saves us and gives us life (John 10 v8, 10) – and He will protect us and keep us safe forever (John 10 v28, 29).

Day 7

"For I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you" (Acts 18 v10a).

There are many more names given in the Bible for God. But we will just look at one more today.

Jehovah Nissi

We read in Exodus 17 that the children of Israel were attacked by the Amalekite army with many thousands of soldiers. Their leader, Moses, decided on a two point plan.

- Firstly, he asked his assistant Joshua to choose men from among the people and go out and fight the Amalekites. And Joshua did so.
- Secondly, Moses along with Aaron and Hur went up onto the top of a nearby hill and prayed that God would defend their nation and help Joshua and his army defeat their strong enemy.

Joshua and his men fought hard, and Moses and his two friends prayed fervently. The result was that God answered their prayers and helped Joshua and his men to defeat completely those who were attacking them.

And so God's people were safe. Why? Because God had protected them. He always does. JEHOVAH is our Protector.

After God had answered their prayers and given them victory Moses built an altar (Exodus 17 v15) and called it JEHOVAH NISSI which means JEHOVAH God is our BANNER.

In the past armies would fight under a flag or a banner as a sign of which army it was and who was responsible for them. JEHOVAH was the BANNER under Whom Moses and Joshua fought – and it was He Who was responsible for them and protected them from their enemies.

And He, JEHOVAH NISSI – the Lord Jesus Christ – is our banner today. He is the One under whose banner we fight our enemies – the world, the flesh and the devil. He is the One Who protects us from those enemies as He protected Paul in Corinth, as our verse for today tells us. Why should we as Christians be afraid of anything or anybody when we have such a powerful and loving God Who protects us?

Let us just remind ourselves, as we come to the end of this week, of some of those wonderful Bible verses which promises and assures us that our Jehovah God will give us the victory in all our struggles:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8 v31).

"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us" (Romans 8 v37).

"But thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15 v57).

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith" (1 John 5 v4).

Victory is ours through our JEHOVAH NISSI.

Week 25: Theme – Varied Themes

Day 1

What is Your Name? I

“And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11 v26).

Last week we studied in some detail the Names of God. I thought it would be good for the first two days of the week to study our names and find out what we are called by God in His Word.

There are at least five names which God has given those who have trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour:

➤ WE ARE BELIEVERS

This word often describes those who have trusted the Lord Jesus throughout the New Testament (e.g. Romans 3 v22; 2 Corinthians 6 v15; 1 Timothy 4 v10, 12).

➤ WE ARE SAINTS

Some churches and many people use this name only for a very special group of people who have been chosen for their spirituality or deeds. But the New Testament shows us that all believers are saints (e.g. Philippians 1 v1).

➤ WE ARE BROTHERS (AND SISTERS)

This word is used throughout the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles (e.g. Acts 13 v38, Philippians 4 v21).

➤ WE ARE CHRISTIANS

This is an interesting title and we can find it in three places – each of which helps us to understand the meaning of the word.

- ✓ *“Almost you persuade me to be a Christian”* (Acts 26 v28). This was Agrippa's reply to Paul after he had witnessed to him and evangelized him.

A Christian is therefore a person who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit is “*persuaded*” to trust Christ, on the basis of what he has heard and understood.

- ✓ “*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*” (Acts 11 v26). This is our verse for today.

Unsaved people called believers Christians because they spoke about Christ and lived for Christ. They were “Christ’s”.

A Christian is therefore a person who confesses his faith in Jesus Christ and lets others know that he is following Jesus Christ.

Incidentally this verse also shows us that the words “disciples” and “Christian” are synonymous and mean the same thing.

- ✓ “*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian let him not be ashamed*” (1 Peter 4 v16). But the Bible also reminds us that a Christian is someone who may suffer because of his life and testimony.

The Christian life is one of joy and blessing, but it is not without problems and suffering – and we need to remind our children that this is so.

Day 2

What is Your Name? II

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11 v28, 29).

Everyone who has trusted Jesus Christ as their Saviour is a BELIEVER, A SAINT, A BROTHER (OR SISTER), and A CHRISTIAN.

- But the name which is most used for the person who has trusted Jesus Christ is the word DISCIPLE, and it occurs frequently in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles e.g. Matthew 28 v16; Acts 1 v15. The Bible teaches us clearly what it means to be a disciple.

- ✓ A disciple is A BELIEVER

The Bible makes no distinction between those who have trusted Jesus Christ and those who are disciples. Believers do not become disciples at a later date and as the result of some special experience. They are already disciples and, if not, then they are not believers.

Many verses show that all believers are disciples (Acts 6 v1, 2; Acts 6 v7; Acts 9 v1, 19; Acts 14 v22). And our verse from yesterday clearly showed us that those who were Christians were also disciples.

Are you and I believers in Jesus Christ and therefore disciples?

- ✓ A disciple is A LEARNER

That's what the Greek word "disciple" means. Therefore a disciple of Jesus Christ is a person who learns from Him. Our verse for today exhorts us to COME to Jesus Christ and LEARN from Him. These verses emphasize that all who have come to Him are disciples. How can a person be a Christian if he does not learn something from Jesus Christ?

Are you and I really learning from our Master?

- ✓ A disciple is A FOLLOWER

The word "disciple" not only means "one who learns" but its full meaning is "one who follows the teaching and instructions of another". It is not just a question of learning something – but of seeking to put what we have learned into practice.

The word "disciple" does not appear in the epistles but the words "follow" and "followers" occur many times.

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should FOLLOW His steps" (1 Peter 2 v21b).

Are you and I really following our Master?

Discipleship needs to grow and deepen, but the process starts at our conversion. At the beginning we did not yet understand all the implications of the step we took when we trusted Christ – but they have become clearer since then – and we have sought to respond obediently to what we have learned – so that we will be better and more faithful disciples – as learners and followers.

Day 3

Lift Up Your Eyes

It is so easy to focus upon ourselves, our work, our family and our needs. But the Bible reminds us, indeed commands us to "**lift up your eyes**" (Isaiah 40 v26; Jeremiah 13 v20; John 4 v35) and focus on God and the things of God. And one word which the Bible uses to encourage us to do this is the word "Behold" or "Look at".

- BEHOLD THE LAMB

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!' " (John 1 v29).

First of all we need to lift up our eyes and see the Lord Jesus and His death on the Cross for our sin. We look, firstly, at HIS CROSS.

➤ **BEHOLD THE LION**

"But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.' " (Revelation 5 v5).

This sight shows our Saviour not now on the Cross (and that can bring tears to our eyes), but on the throne (and that takes away the tears). The lamb is a picture of humiliation and death; the lion is a picture of exaltation and life.

And so we look, secondly, at His CONQUEST.

➤ **BEHOLD THE LORD**

"Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints' " (Jude 14).

The lamb speaks of His Cross, the lion speaks of His conquest and the Lord speaks of His coming.

We need to see that He died for us; and He rose again, and is exalted and on the throne; but we also need to see that He will return to earth again one day. Yes, we need to look, thirdly at HIS COMING.

➤ **BEHOLD THE LOVE**

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 John 3 v1).

The underlying reason for all we have seen so far has been God's wonderful love. And because of that love, when we trust the Lord Jesus, we become children of God.

Let us look often and intently at that wonderful love, think about it and praise God for it – and for the wonderful truth that we are now called God's sons and daughters. And so we need to look, fourthly, at OUR CALLING as children of God.

➤ **BEHOLD THE LADS AND LASSIES**

In Matthew 18 verses 1-14 the Lord Jesus Christ called a little child, set him in the midst of His disciples and, although He does not use the actual word "Behold", He refers over and over again to THIS child (verses 3, 4, 5, 6, 10 and 14). "Look at him" He says, "and learn what I want to teach you through him."

He is a little lost sheep (verse 11), I am looking for him (and verse 12) and when I find him (verse 13) he will be saved.

And so, lastly, we need to look at THE CHILDREN.

And you and I have a work to do – to reach the lads and lassies and give them the opportunity to be saved.

Day 4

God's Commands for Pilgrims

"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2 v11).

Exodus is the book of pilgrimage. It is the biblical "Pilgrim's Progress". The children of Israel are on a journey from Egypt to Canaan. And during those 40 years of pilgrimage God gave three very important commands:

- In chapter 12 He commanded them to keep the Passover which He had just instituted. He wanted them to remember what He had done on that night in Egypt to save them from their oppression.
The Passover was then a **COMMEMORATION OF DELIVERENCE**.
And God expected from them **A CONTINUAL REMEMBRANCE**.
- In chapter 20 onwards God gave the law to His people and through it showed them what He required of them and the standards He set for them. At the same time these commands of the law showed them how far they fell short of those standards and that they needed salvation.
So the purpose of the law was the **CONDEMNATION OF SIN**.
And God wanted it to lead to **CONTRITE REPENTANCE**.
- In chapter 35 onwards God gave the command to build the tabernacle. This was the place where God wanted His people to fellowship with Him and worship Him.
So the purpose of the tabernacle was **COMMUNION WITH THE SAVIOUR**.
And God wanted it to lead to a **CONSTANT RELATIONSHIP**.

We are also pilgrims, as our verse for today reminds us, and are on our journey to Heaven. And our needs are the same in many ways as the needs of those Israelite pilgrims. One way these three needs are met is through our attendance and participation at the Lord's Table or the Communion service.

And so Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11 that the Lord Jesus instituted it with three main purposes for us:

- Firstly, (like the Passover), it is as a **COMMEMORATION OF OUR SALVATION**. He wants it to be a **CONTINUAL REMEMBRANCE** of what He did for us on the Cross:
"In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes'" (1 Corinthians 11 v25, 26).

- Secondly, (like the law) it can be a CONDEMNATION of our SIN. He wants us to examine and judge ourselves when at the Lord's Table and this should lead to CONTRITE REPENTANCE.
"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11 v28, 29).
- And, thirdly, and most importantly, the Lord's Table is a place where we meet with the Lord and have COMMUNION WITH THE SAVIOUR. This helps build a CONSTANT RELATIONSHIP with Him.
"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10 v16).

Day 5

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15 v58).

At the end of Paul's great chapter on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Paul brings a personal application of that great truth to the Corinthian believers which is contained in our verse for today and consists of three commands and one promise:

- **BE STEADFAST** – which means to be seated and at rest
 This shows that we should be steady, firm, and settled – and not confused – especially with regard to the doctrines and truth which we believe, and especially with the great truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You must be careful not to lose your grip of the truth.
 Paul repeats this command in Colossians 1 v23 when he encourages the Colossian believers to *"continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the truth of the Gospel."* And he expresses this same desire to the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 4 v14 that they *"be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine."*
 Surely the personal application of this command to you and me is that we should be consistent students of Bible doctrine and make sure that we have a good doctrinal basis for our living and ministry.
- **BE IMMOVABLE**
 The previous command dealt with the danger we face from within – spiritual instability and doctrinal confusion. This second command deals with the danger from without. Paul is telling them not to let anyone move them from what they believe and from what they are doing. Paul's own testimony in

Acts 20 v24 was that in the face of the bonds and afflictions he was determined not to falter. He said, "*none of these things move me*" (verse 23). His goal was to be immovable in the face of opposition and problems from outside himself.

Is there something or someone trying to move you away from what God wants you to do? Be immovable.

➤ ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD

But, while steadfastness and immovability are essential, they are not enough. We must also see the importance of conscious activity, work and ministry. And so Paul reminds us about being involved in the WORK of the Lord. He commands us, thirdly, to work, to be busy. But the words he uses ("*always abounding*") indicate that we should get more involved in God's work, progressing, developing, going on and on, doing more, and doing it better. It includes the thought of "joy" – that we work joyfully and not just from a sense of duty.

➤ THE PROMISE

And there is a result promised to the person who is steadfast, immovable and busy for God – and he wants us to know this.

Your labour (hard work) will not be in vain (without results) – provided it is done in the Lord (as we are guided and used by Him). We can be sure that He will always bless the work of the steadfast, immovable, busy servant of God.

And He will bless you and me also and our ministry if we fulfil His three conditions.

Day 6

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11 v6).

Hebrews chapter 11 is the great "faith chapter" and catalogues many of the great heroes of faith throughout the Old Testament.

The first three examples of faith recorded in this chapter are Abel, Enoch and Noah. And it is interesting that these three men are not only in the right order historically and chronologically; but we can see that, in this order, they portray an interesting and chronological sequence of the results of faith in the lives of individual Christians like you and me. And it is that faith, according to our verse for today, which pleases God.

- First in the sequence is ABEL (Hebrews 11 v4)
The main result of faith in his life was that HE WORSHIPPED. And that is the first and most important responsibility in your life and mine today and should be the first result of our faith.
 - ✓ Abel's worship was based on REVELATION. What he did and what he brought to the altar was determined by what God wanted and had revealed. His brother Cain disregarded that revelation.
Our worship must be based on what God has revealed – especially about Himself.
 - ✓ Abel's worship was based on REDEMPTION. Blood had to be shed and an animal had to be sacrificed as his substitute.
Our worship is based upon the redeeming sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Abel's worship was accepted because of its two foundations.
And our worship will be accepted on the same foundation.
- Second in the sequence is ENOCH (Hebrews 11 v5).
The main result of his faith was HE WALKED. Enoch left behind this wonderful testimony – that he walked with God:
 - ✓ His walk COMMENCED when he was 65 years old (Genesis 5 v21).
 - ✓ His walk CONTINUED for 300 years (Genesis 5 v22).
 - ✓ His walk CONCLUDED when he was taken up by God into His presence (Genesis 5 v24).

And God's witness and testimony to him was that he pleased God (Hebrews 11 v5).
And we will please God also if we walk with Him. But don't forget that God's order is "Abel first and then Enoch." Our WORSHIP is our first priority and then our WALK.
- Third in the sequence is NOAH (Hebrews 11 v7).
The main result of his faith was that he WORKED. God commanded him to DO something and he did it. He built the ark (Genesis 6):
 - ✓ It was difficult hard work. He had never built an ark before! And the people mocked him.
 - ✓ It was a long work lasting over 100 years but he kept at it.
 - ✓ It was an important work which resulted in the salvation of mankind.

And God has a work for you and me to do. It might be difficult; it might be long; but it is important and we must do it. But remember God's sequence, and God's priorities.
Abel → Enoch → Noah
Our worship → our walk → our work. Let's keep them in that order.

Day 7

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith” (1 John 5 v4).

On this last day of our week I would like to deal with the greatest problem faced by you and me. We have trusted Jesus Christ as our Saviour and all our sin has been forgiven – forever. But our old nature remains – and as a result of that we still sin. But we don’t want to sin and our main problem is how to deal with, and overcome, specific sins in our lives and get the victory spoken about in our verse for today.

Do you and I have a problem, for example, with our tongue? The misuse of the tongue is one of the most prevalent sins in the lives of Christians and that is why we have so many commands and warnings about the use of our tongue in the Bible (for example Psalm 34 v13; Proverbs 13 v3; Ephesians 4 v31; James 1 v26; 1 Peter 3 v10).

I believe that to overcome a specific sin, such as the misuse of the tongue, we need to take six steps:

- We need, firstly, to be CONVICTED of that specific sin and know that it is wrong (Isaiah 6 v5).
- We need, secondly, to CONFESS that specific sin to God and ask Him for forgiveness (1 John 1 v9).

It is interesting to read that Isaiah was convicted of a sin which involved the wrong or unclean use of his tongue and he confessed it to God in Isaiah 6 v5

“Woe is me! (that is conviction) for I am unclean; because I am a man of unclean lips” (that is confession).

- The third step is to have a DESIRE to overcome that specific sin in our lives and turn from it. The Bible calls this repentance. Peter exhorts us in 1 Peter 2 v1,2 – to stop or lay aside the sins of the tongue and, *“desire the sincere milk of the Word.”*
- If that desire is there then the next step is to PRAY and ASK God to give the strength you need to overcome that specific sin. For example David in Psalm 141 v3 asks the Lord to *“set a watch before my mouth”* – and to *“keep the door of my lips”*. He realizes like James in James 3 v8 that *“the tongue can no man tame”* – and that only his Lord can give him the strength and ability to control his mouth – and give him victory over the sins which that mouth could create.
- But there is another step to take. Having asked God to give me victory over a sin, I need to do all I can to DISCIPLINE myself and overcome that sin.

Victory is a partnership between God and me; God gives THE POWER, I make decisions and exercise discipline.

And so David in Psalm 39 v1 outlines his responsibility with regard to his tongue *"I will take heed to my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle."*

➤ And then, lastly, I need to use the means of grace which God has provided to help me to have victory to overcome my sin and to grow in that victory:

- ✓ Through regular daily Bible study.
- ✓ Through prayer – especially in my Quiet Time.
- ✓ Through fellowship with other Christians.

Yes – there is VICTORY for me!



Hebrews 11:6

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

Week 26: Three Vital Themes

Day 1

"All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Daniel 4 v35).

I have entitled our meditations for this last week "Three vital themes". I would like to share with you the three truths which have influenced me in my Christian life – more than any other (except, of course, the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ died for me!).

The Sovereignty of God

I had been a Christian and a full-time children's worker for many years before I came into a full understanding of this wonderful truth which is, many theologians believe, the most important and the most foundational truth in the Bible. I had always believed, to some extent, that God was in control of all that happened. But around 20 years ago I came to see that God is in complete control of ALL things which happen to ALL people at ALL times – and that, of course, includes me. God has a plan towards which He is working and no one or nothing can stop Him or hinder Him. He will always accomplish His purposes. Our verse for today states all of this clearly and this truth is emphasized over and over again right through the Bible:

"He is a great King over ALL the earth" (Psalm 47 v2b).

"ALL nations before Him are as nothing" (Isaiah 40 v17a).

This truth and these verses mean that when something happens to me there are only two reasons why it happened:

- God sent it – as He sent the storm and the fish into Jonah's life (Jonah 1).
- God allowed it – as He allowed Paul to have a thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12 v7).

There is no third alternative. If there was, God would not be sovereign over ALL. And believing this truth wholeheartedly can make an enormous difference to our lives – especially when problems come. Instead of becoming angry (or

sad); instead of blaming others; instead of deep self-pity – we should lift our eyes and thoughts to God and realize that He has allowed it to happen – for our good – and learn what we can from it. We always need to remember that ALL that happens is for our good. God wants to help us – not harm us or hurt us. And not only does this great truth greatly help us and encourage us in our lives; it also helps us in our ministry.

There is nothing too big for God. *“With God ALL things are possible”* (Matthew 19 v26b).

Do you believe this great truth?

- Is there someone for whose salvation you have prayed – without result? Don’t give up. God can change the most resistant heart (Acts 9 v1, 6).
- Is there a problem in your ministry? Is there someone who is causing difficulty? God can change his heart and attitude (Proverbs 21 v1).

This truth has become the mainstay of my life and ministry. I don’t know how I could have lived and served without it.

Day 2

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7 v11).

I trust that your devotional yesterday on the sovereignty of God has really been a means of blessing, help and encouragement to you – as it has been over and over again to me.

The second great truth which has been so influential in my life and ministry is the truth of the Fatherhood of God.

The Fatherhood of God

In one of our devotionals several weeks ago we thought of “adoption” as one of the great results of our salvation. Adoption, let me remind you, is that act of God when He takes us into His family, at the moment of our regeneration, and appoints us His sons (or daughters) and heirs (Galatians 4 v4, 5; Romans 8 v15; 2 Corinthians 6 v18).

When we trusted Jesus Christ as our Saviour we became sons and daughters of God – and God became our Heavenly Father. He was not so beforehand. He is only the Father of those who trust Jesus Christ.

This, then, is a wonderful truth. Dr. J I Packer, the well known theologian and author, writes in one of his books (*“Knowing God”*) that adoption is the greatest and most wonderful result of our salvation. And I can understand why he came

to that conclusion. There are at least four truths about the Fatherhood of God which help us to understand why adoption is such a great blessing:

- Because God is our Father He cares for us and wants the very best for us. His attitude towards His children is always one of infinite love.

The Lord Jesus in Matthew 6 v7-11 exhorts us to pray – to ask, to seek and to knock. Then He speaks about a child who goes to his father and asks him for some bread and some fish to eat. He asked the question – would a human father give that child a stone and a snake instead of what he had asked for? Of course not. Why not? Because he loves his son, cares for him and wants to give him the very best. And then in our verse for today the Lord Jesus emphasizes how much more our Heavenly Father cares for us and loves us and wants the best for us; and how much more He will give us those good things we ask for and which He sees we really need. These verses really encourage us to understand the love and goodness of our Heavenly Father and to “keep asking” for those things which we know are good.

- Because God is our Father He comfort and strengthens us in times of sadness. Just as an earthly father hugs his child who has lost something and wipes away his tears so our Heavenly Father “hugs” us, comforts us and wipes away our tears.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1 v3, 4).

And when He comforts us He wants us also to comfort others.

How could we possibly live and serve without such a wonderful Heavenly Father?

Day 3

“..... I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6 v17b and 18).

We continue today to think about the Fatherhood of God. How wonderful it is to have God as our Heavenly Father as we see in our verse for today. He loves us, cares for us, wants the best for us and comforts us in times of sadness.

- Because God is our Father He gives us all we need every day. Why, therefore, should we worry?

Perhaps you and I are in the same position as the disciples of the Lord Jesus when He called them into His service, and sent them out to minister to others. It was, and would be, a big step for them – and, as they thought of all that would be involved, they would start to worry.

So in Matthew 6 when the Lord Jesus was speaking to them He told them over and over again not to worry. They were not to worry about what they should eat or drink (verses 25, 31) about what they should wear (verses 25, 30, 31), nor should they worry about the future (verse 34), or how long they should live (verse 27). But He did not just give them a command “Don’t worry”; He gave them a reason, a good reason, why they should not worry.

He told them they had a Heavenly Father – and that He would look after them and meet their needs in two ways:

- ✓ First of all, as their Heavenly Father, He knew everything they needed:
“For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matthew 6 v32).
- ✓ Secondly, as their Heavenly Father, He loved them and cared for them more than the birds or anything else, and He is able to meet those needs:
“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6 v26).

He is able to meet our needs. Why should we worry about that?

Are you worried about something or someone? Remember that you have a Heavenly Father Who knows about it, Who cares for you and is ready and willing and able to meet that need.

- Because God is our Father He will correct us and chastise us when we need it. Those of us who are parents have a responsibility not just to love, but to care for, and meet the needs of our children. We have also a responsibility to show them what is right and wrong, and try to help them to do what is right by correcting them and, if necessary, chastising them when they do wrong.

“Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect.” (Hebrews 12 v9a).

And that is what our Heavenly Father does – but He never makes any mistakes and He never loses His temper. He knows exactly the correction and the amount of chastisement we need – and He administers it in the correct way:

"For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12 v10).

And that correction or chastening will help us to be the people God wants us to be.

"Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12 v11).

Isn't it wonderful to have a Heavenly Father Who loves us, comforts us, meets our every need and corrects us when we need it?

Day 4

"But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD" (Jeremiah 9 v24).

During the rest of this week we will meditate on a subject which has been of inestimable value to me personally for many years, and of which I have spoken and written many times. I have expanded upon it in the first book I wrote *"The Problems of a Children's Workers – and God's Solution."*

Have you ever heard of treasure? Buried treasure?

Buried Treasure

Would you like to look for this treasure? It is very valuable, but it is buried and it needs a lot of hard work to find it – and a map would be absolutely essential. The main problem which you and I have today is that we often do not really know what God is like. That seems a strange statement; but I believe it is true. And yet we know that what we are, how we pray, how we live and how we serve depend upon our picture or image of God and our knowledge of Him. This picture of God, this knowledge of God, is the treasure we are looking for – and if we haven't already started in our "treasure hunt", let us do so today.

And it is wonderful that God has provided us with a map to show us this treasure and how to find it. That map is the Bible, the Word of God. And the main purpose of the Bible is not just to tell us that we need to be saved, or how to be saved, or how to grow spiritually (although it does, of course, tell us all these things). Its main purpose is to reveal God to us and to show us what He is really like. That's why it is called the Word of God.

So what is my picture of God, your picture of God? If someone asked you today what God is like what would your answer be?

Let us start, then, on our treasure trail, and search for this wonderful treasure which is so valuable and yet hidden. It can be found with some work:

- The treasure is to know what God is like, and then to know Him better as encouraged in our verse for today.
- The map is the Word of God which reveals God to us.
- And our work and task is to study God's Word and find out, from it, what God is really like. You can do so in your Quiet Time each morning.

During your Quiet Time you should do three things:

- Read and meditate upon a passage from the Bible.
- Worship God on the basis of what you have read.
- Talk to God in prayer – for yourself and for others.

You should not make the main purpose and goal of your Bible reading to find some help or promise for the day which follows, or to find a command to be obeyed or a warning to be heeded – although you will invariably find one or more of these – and they need to be believed and obeyed. But your main purpose should be to find out what God is like.

This is the treasure you are looking for.

Day 5

“..... but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits” (Daniel 11 v32b).

The problem we all have is that we are so egocentric. And, as a result, we look in our Bible reading for something for ourselves – a promise, an encouragement, a warning, or an answer to a problem. And this is often also very true of our prayers. Many of us have problems, and we look for the answer to these problems in our Bible reading – and we often find that the more we focus on our problems and look for an answer to them the greater they become.

What is the answer? We need to focus upon God; not our problem, not ourselves, not others – but God. That is why when we read the Bible we should first of all ask ourselves the question:

“What does this passage or chapter, or verse, teach me about God?”

The answer is the treasure we are looking for – the buried treasure.

And when you find an answer write it down, meditate upon it, and then in the second part of your Quiet Time worship God on the basis of the truth which you have learned. And the more you do this you will find either that your

problem will lessen or disappear – or it will remain but you will have strength to handle it.

I would like to suggest a practical path for you to follow in your search for this buried treasure in the weeks and months which lie ahead.

Start at the 40th chapter of the book of Isaiah and go through the rest of that book verse by verse and chapter by chapter. As you do so, write down what you learn about God – and worship Him on the basis of what you learn. After you finish Isaiah do the same through the book of Psalms.

An alternative path to find the buried treasure is to choose one of God's attributes – His grace or His power or His love or His holiness – and study that attribute through all Scripture. Then proceed to another attribute.

As you follow either of these treasure trails you will see God as He really is, you will worship Him and you will come to know Him better and better.

And as you learn more about what God is like and you come to know Him better, you will be strengthened in your life and ministry as our verse for today tells us. Your life will be changed, your problems will be solved (or you will have more strength to handle them), your prayers will be helped and deepened, and your service will be encouraged.

Wouldn't that be valuable treasure?

And the place to start is in your Quiet Time each morning.

And don't forget to share what you have learned about God with your children. They also need to know these wonderful truths. So as you prepare the Bible lesson which you will teach, and as you study the passage on which it is based, ask yourself the question – "What does this passage teach me about God?" – and then teach that truth to your children and apply it to them.

Day 6

"Lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!'" (Isaiah 40 v9b).

Let us today put into practice the proposal I made yesterday – to look for buried treasure and to do so in the 40th chapter of Isaiah. And the way to find that treasure is to ask ourselves "What does this chapter (or this verse) teach me about God?" And the answer to that question is the treasure. God wants us, more than anything else, to "*Behold Him*" as today's verse tells us.

And so we come to that chapter with our empty "suitcase" to see if we can fill it with treasure:

- I find some GOLD in verses 12, 22, 26 and 28 – that God is the CREATOR. (Isaiah 40 v12).

His creation is an evidence of His power which is available for me (verse 29) Why should I be weak and faint when the Creator gives power to the faint?

HECREATEDEVERYONE.

- I find some SILVER in verses 10, 15, and 23 – that God is in CONTROL of the earth and everyone in it.

“He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless” (Isaiah 40 v23).

He is in complete control of everything including the circumstances in my life. Why should I worry? Can I not leave everything in His Hands?

HECONTROLESEVERYTHING.

- I find some RUBIES and EMERALDS in verses 13 and 14 – that God is WISE and knows everything.

“Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him?” (Isaiah 40 v13).

He knows everything; I don’t. But I can trust Him to guide me according to His perfect wisdom and knowledge. Why should I be confused when God is ready to lead me?

HECOMPREHENDSEVERYTHING.

- I find a special DIAMOND right in the middle of the chapter and amongst all these great truths concerning God’s creation, God’s control and God’s comprehension. This great and wonderful God loves us and cares for us.

“He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young” (Isaiah 40 v11).

What a wonderful picture! He looks after us as a shepherd looks after his sheep. He feeds us, He gathers us, He carries us and He leads us. Why should I have any fears about the future when I have a God and a Shepherd like this?

HE CARESFOREVERYONE OF US

But don’t forget that all these truths about God are not just truths to understand. They all have applications to our lives and when we really understand them and apply them we will be helped and strengthened in our lives.

And you can see, therefore, as you come to the last three verses of this chapter, the application of all these truths:

- God gives power to the faint (verse 29a).
 - God increases strength to the weak (verse 29b).
 - God enables those who wait on Him (verse 31).
- ✓ To fly

- ✓ To run
- ✓ To walk

May these applications be true in our lives.

Day 7

In our last devotional this week we want to continue with the method of Bible reading and Bible study which we have outlined in our last two devotionals. And I would recommend, once more, that as you read and study your Bible the first and most important question you should ask yourself is – “What does this passage (this verse) teach me about God?”

When we study the book of Jonah (and preach on it) we usually focus on Jonah, what he did and what he didn't do, and we seek to learn what we can from the examples he has given us of disobedience and obedience. But the book of Jonah is not primarily about Jonah. Its primary purpose is to tell us what God is like. What are the truths about God in the book of Jonah?

Chapter 1 - God is Persistent

God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh; but Jonah disobeyed. What does God do when His servant disobeys Him? There are two possibilities:

- He could dispense with that person and choose someone else to do it.
- Or He could work with the person until he repented and obeyed.

And it was this second possibility which God used with Jonah.

He PERSISTED with him. He sent a storm (verse 4) and He sent a fish (verse 17). God had determined that Jonah would go to Nineveh.

Chapter 2 - God is Present

Jonah was now inside the great fish. But an even greater miracle was that God was also there in the fish. God was PRESENT there and ready to hear Jonah's voice when he prayed. And when he repented and resolved to obey God (verse 9) God spoke to the fish and Jonah was thrown up unto dry land.

And isn't it wonderful to have a God Who never leaves us, Who is present with us in our darkest hours and ready to listen to us when we talk to Him?

Chapter 3 - God is Powerful

And so Jonah went to Nineveh and preached his message of repentance and salvation to them. And we now see the greatest demonstration of all of God's POWER. The whole city of Nineveh repented and turned to God (verse 10) and were saved.

And our God is still powerful and able to save the most sinful of people.

Chapter 4 - God is Patient

But Jonah, instead of being thankful that the city had repented and had been saved was angry. "I just knew you would do that - and I look so silly. What I told them would happen hasn't happened." What did God do? Did He rebuke him or punish him for his anger and lack of love? No! He was PATIENT with him and pleaded with him (verse 4); and then He used a visual aid (verses 6-8) to teach him not to be angry. God was so patient with His servant. Isn't it wonderful to have a God Who is so patient with us? Think of what would have happened to us if He had not been patient?



Ephesians 2:4,5

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."