

Sunday 14 March 2010 10.30 a.m.

Discipleship 2010: Building, Outreach, Belonging. X11.

MARCH: PREPARING THE STONES

GIVING UP OR SELLING OUT ?

Philippians 2 v 5-11

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

REFERENCES

Philippians 2 v 5-11; Proverbs 13, v 12; Romans 5,5 and 6; 1 John 2 v3-6, Matt 8 v27 , Mark 4v 41, Luke 8v 25,

Introduction:

Have you ever felt let down by someone? Maybe someone forgot your birthday? Or perhaps someone promised you as a child that something would happen – a special meal or a treat – and then it didn't happen. Maybe someone promised to have a word with the boss about a job. Or told you that if you did (X), then they would see that (Y) would - or would not – happen.

It's saddening, it can make you mad, and it can even make you despair. The Bible says that *Hope deferred makes the heart sick (Proverbs 13, v 12) .. but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.* Isn't that inspiring! Not a bush, not a flower – a great Tree, a strong support, - that is what it is like to have hope in your life.

When I was about eleven, I used to commute on the train - on my own – to school. In the evenings I would get on the train at Liverpool Street, and it was usually dark by the time we got to Chelmsford, so on the walk home I used to amuse myself by trying to imagine what was for tea. The station was about a mile from home, so it passed the time! Tuesday was one of my favourite days – sausage pie! Anticipation...! I will never forget that feeling of anticipation – or the Tuesday that I arrived home to no sausage pie! I can still hear my mum: “ Oh I didn't think you liked it particularly”!

Why am I telling you about that? Well, today I want us to think together about the hope we have as Christians:

A Sure Hope: we are loved!

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome about hope he wasn't talking about, something unreal. At that time the Christians in Rome were undergoing some severe persecution: their businesses and homes were confiscated, their families were torn apart, their lives were turned upside down. Some of them were tortured, and killed. These people knew about trouble, and yet hope was a reality for them. Paul was as focussed on what happened to these men and women inside their minds and hearts as well as in their lives.

He wrote: *"we know that suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5v 5)"* So we see, that the root of everything is the love of God. It is love that makes it possible to trust, even through the hard times.

"...God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us. You see – at just the right time, when we were still powerless., Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5v 5-6)

I love this verse. It's really good for sharing with those people who think that Christians have to be one cut above the rest of the human race. But it wasn't for the already obedient! Not for the holy (wholly) religious lot – Christ died for the Ungodly. Just as well, isn't it! Otherwise we Christians wouldn't have much of a chance of being loved by God! Christ died for people who mess up – like you, me and everyone – so that just about kills off the idea that Christians are any better than non-Christians - we are not better at all! But – we do have a tremendous hope to share.

Because Jesus was obedient, he went to his death. Because he was willing to place himself unconditionally in God's hands, God was able to raise him from death, and to pour out his love into our hearts.

OK Just a minute. Hands up if you are walking around every minute of every day, and especially every Monday morning feeling loved and cherished, and special, and just longing to find out what the day will bring ?? no? NO-one? Funny, that. I know I don't. But you see - we are forgetting something. If you try to measure how much God loves you by looking at all the things that are happening in your life, you are going to have to search among all the other millions of things that don't come straight from heaven.

But if you start by searching for the person who is doing the loving, you will probably end by seeing the new things he is doing. God went through Hell to get us back - already.

[Imitation, Imitation, Imitation.](#)

"We know that we have come to know Him, if we obey his commands. If anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him: whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."
(1st letter of John ch 2, v 3-6)

The Bible is alarmingly clear: whoever claims to be a Christian must live as Jesus did. So it isn't primarily about attending church (though meeting with other Christians to pray and to share meals, and to praise God is one part of the Jesus lifestyle) It isn't even about reading your Bible (if you have one) though if we are serious about being Christians we are going to need it every day of the rest of our lives.

It is about living as Jesus lived: surrendered, obedient, giving glory to God.

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[What kind of man is this? \(Matt 8 v27, Mark 4v 41, Luke 8v 25\)](#)

Jesus did quite a lot of things while he was on earth that people found difficult to accept. He calmed the wind and the waves on Galilee, he fed huge crowds from small lunch baskets, he healed people who had been unable to walk all their lives, he demonstrated his authority over evil spirits.

What am I saying here? That only people who do some or all of these things are Christians? No. Jesus never claimed any of this authority for himself, If you look in the early chapters of John's Gospel, when his disciples questioned him about his teaching, or when his opponents challenged him, Jesus always says that he only speaks as God tells him to speak, and only acts as instructed by God. (*John 5,19-32; John 6v38; John 7 v16-18; John 8 v26-30*)

Jesus said that the work of God, was *"To believe in the one He has sent"* (*John 6v 29*) and to make disciples, to baptise them and to teach them *"to obey all that I have commanded you"*. In other words, he intended us to imitate his lifestyle of surrender and obedience.

[Giving up, or selling out? \(Sold out on Jesus!\)](#)

I'd like to suggest that this poses us with a pretty hefty problem, because it's possible – though difficult sometimes, for us to give up ways of behaving – telling the odd lie here and there, smoking, drinking too much alcohol, sharp practice – whatever we grew up with, or took up later on.

But this is rather more. It's the incredibly difficult thing to say *"God, I trust you with my life. Where do I go next and what do you want said?"*

The trouble is, most of us are happy enough to deliver "behaviour" – those kinds of habit can be picked up and put down. You can timetable them! You can make people

accountable. But trust doesn't draw a line in the same way – because it's based on a relationship

I remember the first time this dawned on me. I was walking home from the station one day: I must have been about fifteen at the time – and I suddenly realised: how can you give that kind of authority in your life to someone when you hardly know them? Here I was – calling myself a Christian, baptised, going to church, reading my Bible, praying and so on, but - this was different. This was saying to God – “OK – You make the choices!” I felt really alarmed.

Then I thought – Why? Why is this so scary? Well – what am I scared of? And that was interesting, I was scared that God might be like a boss – wants the work out of you, but doesn't always understand that you also need to have a life! Then I thought - but this means giving up control! I might end up somewhere I hate! Then I thought – what if he asks me to do something I am no good at, and I fail? Or takes me far away from my family? Or gets angry with me, when I make mistakes? Or gives up on me halfway through? Or asks me to stay single all my life? I don't want to be old on my own!

This wasn't like giving something up – it was more like a “fire sale”, with dirty great big four foot high letters across all the windows of my life: “ Everything Must Go!” Total sell out. Shop empty, no more stock – not even the coat hangers!

But I was forgetting! This was God I was talking about – not a parent or a teacher at school, or a boss. As in – God who made me (so he knows what I am capable of, better than I do). As in – God who loves me like the best father and best mother ever – without all the bits that go wrong when we are talking about human beings trying to be good parents. As in – God who gave everything he had, and cared most about, just to get back a relationship with me.

I decided I had to rewind the tape a little, and ask if He would mind that I might need to work this through, step by step.

Summary

Today, we are continuing our theme of building, outreach and belonging, and as its still the first part of the year we are thinking about the steps involved in preparing the stones (that's us – the living stones who are the building blocks for God's house)

So – as we come together to share bread and wine and to remember what God has already done for us, I'd like to suggest that we ask ourselves the rather serious question about trust: can I say with Jesus, that I am available to God, to build his kingdom? Is the shop sold out - or is there is there anything I am holding on to:

- my security?
- a comfortable lifestyle?

- my time?
- Am I withholding trust, treating God as if he were another human being, who might be tempted to take advantage?
- Is my independence so important to me that there are some roles I will not fill, in case I have to take instructions from someone else?
- What about addictions - internet? smoking? chocolate? food?. Do I rule, or am I ruled by what I'm eating or drinking or doing?

Let's be honest with our God, and allow Him to show us, how much he loves us

Final Slide and reference:

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 Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
 but made himself nothing,
 taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness
 And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest places
 and gave him the name that is above every name
 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth
 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father*

**** PRAY ****