



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'SUSPENDED CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 17th January 2021



NEWS UPDATE

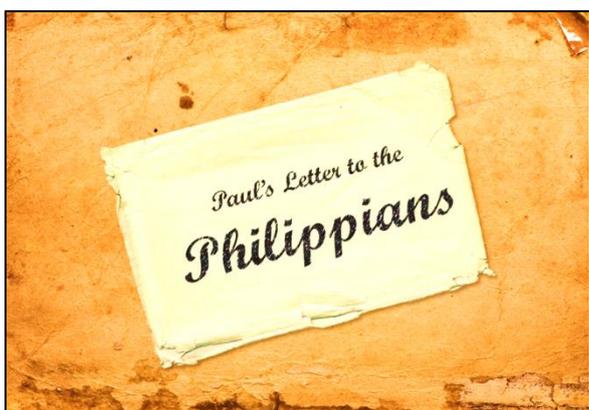
Blackburn Diocese Video – Sunday 31st January

Before Christmas we were approached by the Diocese about providing one of their Sunday videos which are shared on the Blackburn Diocese YouTube channel each week. Having looked at some other examples, each weekly video typically gets 200-300 viewings.

We have agreed to put something together for Sunday 31st January, which is in two weeks' time. Links to the video will be sent out to those who have internet access to watch.

I hope that we can provide the wider diocese with an encouraging message as we continue our series through Paul's letter to the Philippians, and also give people a flavour of who we are at St Christopher's and Emmanuel.

Philippians Series



JOY IN ADVERSITY

Week 2

Seeing God at work in all circumstances

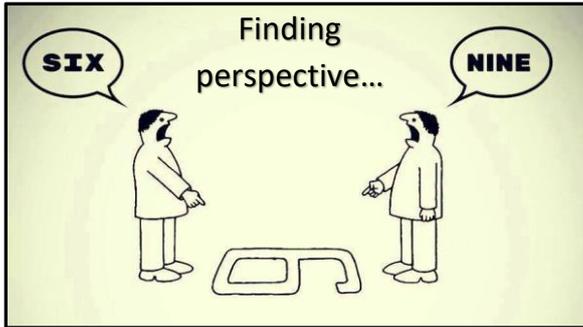
BIBLE READING – Philippians 1:12-18

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

The Battle of the Mind

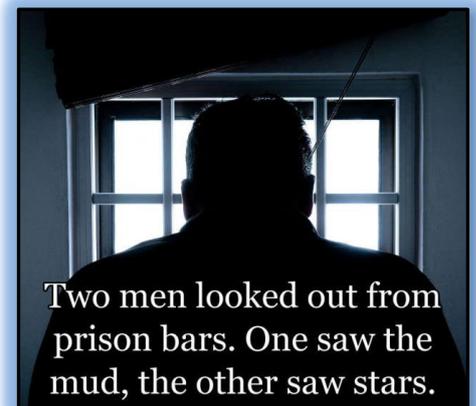


Today, as I write this message, I have just taken a walk around the park in the rain. I had hoped to wait until a dry moment in the day, but it never came! In the end I got to the point where I just had to get out of the house for some fresh air; or at least that's how I felt.

The benefits of taking a stroll include getting some exercise and a change of scenery, but what I really needed was something that would renew my perspective on things, because each day it can be something of a battle to stay positive, especially in lockdown. As I walked around Ashton Park I found myself thanking God for various things (starting with the fact that I live right next to a park), and talking to God about the things that were on my mind. The great thing about walking in the rain is that you rarely pass anyone else, so if you start saying your prayers out loud nobody thinks you are mad. ☺

How do we win the battle in our minds? The truth is that whether or not we feel joyful or contented inside actually has less to do with our life circumstances, and more to do with our outlook. Our outward circumstances will influence how we feel, of course. Issues like physical health problems, tiredness, strained relationships, and various other worries, are bound to affect our perspective on life. But do these things have to rule us?

Somehow St Paul in his letter to the Philippians was able to rejoice whilst looking out from behind prison bars. How did he do it? What kept his perspective so positive? And what can we learn from him as we face our own daily battles?



So long as the Gospel is preached

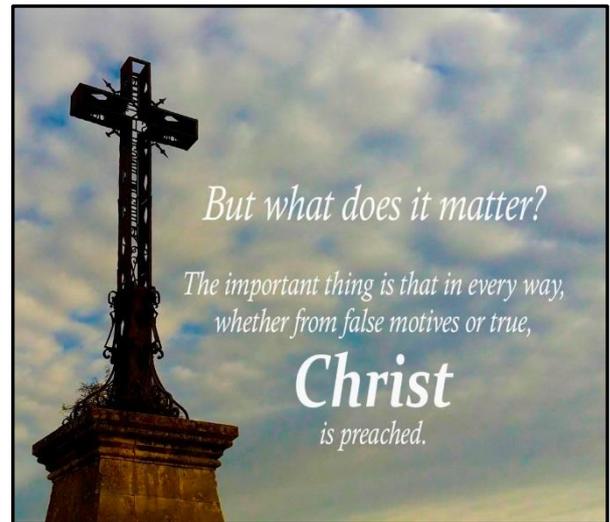
Whether or not we feel happy will have a lot to do with what it is that makes us happy. If all the things that we rely on to boost our positivity have been taken away through pandemic restrictions, then we are bound to struggle.



A more uniquely Christian perspective is to say that *'nothing else really matters apart from whether or not the Gospel is being preached.'* This was Paul's outlook on life; nothing brought him more joy than knowing that the message of God's love in Jesus was being spread. The word Gospel means 'good news,' and for Paul there was no better news than this; that *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in*

him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). If this ‘Gospel’ was being proclaimed, then Paul was happy. For this reason he rejoices that others had been emboldened to preach the Gospel more courageously as a result of his imprisonment. Evidently Paul’s example of faith in the midst of his adversity was inspiring to others.

Paul could have felt upset that some people wished to stir up trouble for him through their ‘envy’, ‘rivalry,’ and ‘selfish ambition,’ but Paul’s attitude was that if these people were proclaiming the Gospel message for the wrong reasons – what does it matter? At least they are still proclaiming the message! This challenges me when I think about how I respond to those who cause me bother. My instinct (and most peoples) is to get annoyed, and to let feelings of anger or frustration occupy my head for a while. Next time we find ourselves in this situation, how about we step back and think about how God’s goodness could still be made known, despite people’s insincere motives?



Pure and loving intentions are worthy of greater rejoicing, of course, but even when this is not the case there may still be things that we can be thankful for. It was commented at our Tuesday evening prayer group that sometimes people attend church for the wrong reasons – maybe to get a child christened, or to receive a school reference. Never mind! They are still getting to hear the Good News! Or we might feel despondent that gathered church services cannot continue at present. Never mind! The Gospel message is still being proclaimed through other means, and in this we can rejoice.

Finding the good in bad situations



Another comment on Tuesday was that very often, ‘*people only see the light when it is dark.*’ We hardly notice a candle flickering in a brightly lit room; but put that candle into a pitch-black space and it will shine for all to see. This would seem to be true of our life experiences, that it is often in the dark times that we look to God and we see His light shining. In Paul’s dark situation he perceived the light of God’s presence shining all the more brightly.

We are experiencing a ‘dark time’ right now on various levels. It is dark by 4.00pm each day, and we are enduring a ‘dark’ time as a nation due to the harsh impact of the pandemic. Wouldn’t it be great if, in the midst of this, people recognised the grace of God and His presence with us in a way that they didn’t during the better times? Perhaps people *will see the light shining in the darkness?* If this were to happen, we would have another reason to rejoice!



Prayers – Written by Jim Cam

Lord, as we think of Paul imprisoned and yet he saw good coming out of his situation;
help us to see the good things that have come to light during this pandemic.

The awareness of the true value of the caring and serving professions,
of family, relationships and friendships,
of the numerous acts of kindness and practical help shown towards neighbours
and those in need, which otherwise would not have happened.

May these good things strengthen and encourage us as we go forward,
and may they continue to inspire us for the future.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

We pray for our nation at this time.

We continue to pray for the vaccination program to be effective, and wisely coordinated,
as it aims to reach more and more people.

We pray for the gift of patience, that the selfishness and irresponsible actions of a minority will decline,
remembering that we all have a part to play for the sake of the common good.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

So much of the normal activity of the church has been prevented by restrictions;
and yet we have been strengthened and have learned new ways to serve the Gospel.

May the Holy Spirit inspire, strengthen, and build up your church,
so that the love of Jesus may be proclaimed to his praise and glory.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

We pray for those whose spirits are laid low with illness whether at home or in hospital.

We remember especially those known to us.....

Bless all that is being done for their good and surround them with your healing love and power.

**Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**