

Grow in doing what pleases God. Jesus promises to grow the church our task is to seek the Kingdom and His righteousness. That is to live under God's Kingship rule.

And pray for it is prayer that we show our dependence on God. As Paul writes in Ephesians 3 pray that out of the Father's glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And pray that you may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Pray to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through-out all generations, for ever and ever!

And in that prayer, trust. Let God do what God alone can do, even as you in His power do what you can do. Let your purpose be to build a house with God, by God, for God.

C2 Consequences: living in the shadow of God's care

Jesus also says: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings .. This is the other side of the consequences of our belonging. Not of judgement but of care. There is no promise that God will take away the dangers we face. Indeed Paul and Barnabas after sharing the good news in Derbe and won a large number of disciples there then returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. Saying "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Chicks live among many dangers but the hen is always willing to gather them in her safety. As the chicks worry so they learn to trust their protector. And as they face those dangers so they grow. As disciples face the hardships that flow from faith so they grow in belief, in behaving, in belonging, in God's loving care.

A devotional thought and testimony by Vanessa [see the Live Stream]



6th Sunday in Easter 2nd May 2021
Matthew 23:34-39

Reflections on 3B's and 2C's

Three general elements that make up God's people The first is being a people who Believe in God. **The 1st B is for Believing.**

Do you remember Sunday 2nd of May's worship? We looked at the Sadducees, the priests who ran the Temple for God, organising its worship and its management. And what we saw was that as a group the Sadducees had lost essential belief in God. They trusted only the first 5 books of the scripture They had no belief in the resurrection and could not see Jesus as anything other than a mere man; and a rather annoying one at that.

In Exodus, the 2nd book of the scripture in c19 the Lord says to Moses: "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel Obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

And God appointed the making a sanctuary for His presence among the people, which was then the Ark of the Covenant but later became the Temple. God called Israel to be His priesthood to the world and anointed priests in Aaron to lead the people's worship as priests of the priesthood – an office the Sadducees later took over. Yet when God in Christ came to Israel the priests did not welcome Him at His birth; nor honour Him in His mission but instead organised His trial to kill Him. And Jesus judged them as neither knowing the scriptures nor the power of God. They were God's priests but they no longer believed.

The 2nd B is for Behaving.

This week we have been reading Jesus' view of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law as given in Matthew c23. It's not a good view. He rebukes them for not practising what they preach. Their lives, as the late R T France says in his excellent commentary, do not match up to their profession of loyalty to God. They love to show off; they revel in social respect and honorific titles, even some of them liking to be called 'Father' as a term of spiritual recognition. But for Jesus 'Father' is always a title reserved for God alone and its use for any man is not acceptable to Him.

So in contrast to the Beatitudes which are to be the joy of His disciples Jesus

denounces them as hypocrites for they do not see that their practice and teaching are inconsistent with their professed desire to please God. And passes 7 woes of judgement over them. The woes are a condemnation concluded by Jesus picking up John the Baptist's complaint. He pictured the Jewish leaders as a brood of vipers fleeing from the wrath to come. Now Jesus declares their flight is futile: How will you escape being condemned to hell?

Israel's leaders claim to believe but they do not behave as those who truly believe. To make things worse, they make it too difficult for the people to affirm their belief in appropriate behaviour by the heavy burdens they place upon them. Burdens which Jesus would replace by His easy yoke.

The 3rd B is for Belonging:

When we think of our belonging do we think of it as our own our action. We see ourselves as decision-makers who choose to belong. But our relationship with God is by His choosing.

As Jesus says to us in John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you. As for us so it was for Israel, as we read on Deuteronomy 7:6 onwards. "The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt." As God says to Israel through Moses when He sets down how they are to behave as His people, Leviticus 26:11a & 12, I will put my dwelling place among you ... I will walk among you & be your God & you will be My people.

Israel's belonging to God was wrapped in an interacting covenant of belief and behaviour as for example God says to the people through Moses in Deut 7: Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; [a call to belief] He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him & keep his commandments. ... Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today. [a call to behaving]. ... if you pay attention to these laws and are careful to keep them, then the Lord your God will keep His covenant of love with you, as He swore to your forefathers. That's belonging, not as an act of the people but as an act of God.

Matthew 23:34-39 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your

house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" He asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

C1 Belief and behaviour have Covenant Consequences for our belonging.

Jesus' rejection by Israel, instigated by her leaders has brought the nation's rebellion to the point where judgement can no longer be delayed. So Jesus who on Palm Sunday referred to the temple as God's house, now calls it your house: look your house is left to you desolate.

Jesus is not referring to the physical condition of the Temple, but to the fact that God has left the building. Jesus left the temple. It is no longer God's house. It may live on but it has no future. The phrase :you will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' is the condition on which Jesus will return but there is no promise that the condition will be fulfilled. It still remains unfulfilled.

Yet Jesus rebuilt God's the temple with living people: God in the Holy Spirit fellowships with all who believe in Jesus and behave in ways pleasing to God. We as Church are part of the Temple of God. But it is not our Temple, our Church. The temple and the church belong to God. The church is not a membership of people but a fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

But our vital life as a church depends on holding true belief and living in ways pleasing to God. God's temple can be destroyed by failures of God's people in belief and behaviour. Jesus tells us that the first commandment is to love God, He is not speaking of our feelings. It is good to love God with our emotions but loving God is expressed first of all in our belief: do we know Him and His scripture? Then by our behaviour: do we live in ways which please Him. It's by our belief and our behaviour that we affirm that we are, as Peter writes, God's people, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

These are days when we worry about the future of the church. How can we survive? How can we manage? We are so few; the work is so huge, the darkness is around us. These are natural human fears. What then are we to do?

Hold fast to the truth of Christ: never try to save the church by watering down belief as a way to attract others to join. It may seem good that new people come in but as they come in God will go out.

