

Keep on going!

Sermon 26<sup>th</sup> Aug 2018

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at what as a Christian we should be packing into our figurative suitcases in order to go on our journey with God.

You may recall we heard how we need to:

Put God first in our lives, easy to say but quite a challenge to do all the time.

How to repent ourselves of our sin and then perhaps harder, to forgive those who have sinned against us;

To meet together regularly to give encouragement and support to one another as we seek to get closer to God, and to encourage each other as we worship God through song and prayer and hearing His word preached and reaching out to those around us in the community.

To pray. Prayer is one of, if not our most powerful weapon in the Spiritual warfare against Satan and in our intimate relationship with God.

To read the Bible both as a source of inspiration and to learn more about God. The Bible is God's truth revealed to us.

To be generous both with our time, our talents, our relating to other people and our finances. Not grudgingly but with a generosity of spirit. We're told in the Bible that God loves a cheerful giver.

To take opportunities to speak about Jesus, not only in church to fellow believers but in our everyday lives as God gives us opportunity and to be bold in our proclamation not timid, we have good news to tell!

To worship everywhere. Worship isn't just about coming to church on a Sunday and singing hymns and choruses, enjoyable as that is. It's equally about the welcome people get on the door, the people who prepare the tea, coffee and biscuits, the people who get the music out and put it back, the people who clean the building so it's nice and welcoming for visitors, those who keep the outside of the building looking bright and welcoming, in fact anyone who does anything which adds to the life of the church is worshipping. Because worshipping is not just something we do it's a lifestyle; a lifestyle dedicated to being the very best we can for God as His representatives, his hands and feet, His voice, His attitude to the rest of the world around us. What they see in us is how they perceive God, Jesus and Christianity.

Quite daunting thoughts in our own strength but the good news for is that we don't need to do it by ourselves. God knows our frailties and has given us a handbook of how to live our lives and how to relate to him and how to journey together with Him to the place where He wants us to be. Our eventual destination is heaven and eternal lives.

You can get books and manuals on how to prepare for a journey most effectively; what to pack, what to leave out, the quickest and cheapest way of booking your tickets if your flying or even if your going by train. The best times of year to go, when to avoid, how to pack your clothing in your

suitcase most efficiently Tick lists of things to avoid leaving an essential behind, what foods to eat and which to avoid if you're going abroad, the lists go on and on and on.

Well as I said a minute ago God gave us a handbook for the very best way in which we can live our Christian lives so that, when we come across troubles and tribulations, and we will, we are clearly told that in this handbook, we are expected to share in Christ's sufferings in order that we may also share in His joy, then we are in the very best condition to cope with them by amongst other things doing what we've heard about over the last few weeks; putting God first, repenting of our sin and forgiving others, meeting together regularly with God's family to encourage and support one another, praying to and listening to God. Reading our Bible so that we are familiar with the truth of God's word, being generous with everything that God has given us, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus at every opportunity, to worship , not only in church but in every situation in our lives.

That handbook is of course the Bible, the inspired word of God in its original form

But thinking about holidays, they are times of refreshing, of recharging the batteries, of relaxation and enjoying the company of those we love and we come back re-invigorated and energised to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday life. Spending time in God's word, or studying God's word with a group of fellow Christians, or spending time in prayer, either alone or corporately can act in a similar way and revitalise our Spiritual batteries, because they do run down from time to time. Lynne and I, when we were younger, used to go every year to Spring Harvest, and there was something really uplifting and encouraging about being in a large arena with thousands of others and praising and worshipping God together. I wouldn't want to do it all the time, but as a one off once a year it did revitalise us and lift us up to continue the Spiritual battle which being a Christian is. We can sometimes forget that we are in a Spiritual battle and drop our guard and Satan can have a field day when that happens putting all sorts of doubts and niggling thoughts into our minds. Many of you will know that I spent some 16 years in the wilderness because I allowed Satan to distract me when I started in a new job and I succumbed to the temptations that came along with it. It wasn't all bad, I met Lynne during that time so God was gracious to me even in the midst of my wanderings away from Him. Eventually both Lynne and I came to the Lord again and here we are. But we need to be aware of Satan and his whiles and may I suggest that you read through Ephesians 6:10-20 at least every six months just to remind yourselves that we are in a Spiritual warfare and we need to put on the FULL armour of God to effectively fight it with God's truth, righteousness and peace. Faith, salvation, God's word and prayer.

What a holiday also does is equip us to keep on going with life , with work, with relationships and with each other. Our handbook, the Bible references keeping going in several places because God knows that in our own strength we will probably fail and we need to keep turning to Him and to His word for encouragement and the building up of ourselves in His strength:

2 Corinthians 4: 16-18 tells us:

“Therefore we do not lose heart, Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day, For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.”

In other words whatever our circumstances are around us, whatever difficulties we may be going through, they, one way or another are going to be resolved, but we need to fix our eyes beyond them to the Lord Jesus Christ who has promised us eternal life and a place with him in heaven. Easy to say I know, not so easy to live out in our daily lives, but if we put into practice some if not all of the things we have heard over the last weeks then it will become easier.

Psalm 34: 17-19 is a real psalm of encouragement for the believer, it acknowledges that being a Christian will not exempt us from troubles but God will be there with us and deliver us: AMEN!

“The righteous cry out and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles but the Lord delivers him from them all.”

God loves and cares for each and every Christian soul. No matter what our circumstance or difficulty He sees it and will deliver us from it in His way and in His time which will be perfect ( even if we don't recognise it at the time!) because God's ways are perfect.

Isaiah 41: 10 is very much a confirmation of Psalm 34. God loves to emphasis with repetition the things which are important to him:

So do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Having read those three passages anyone who believes becoming a Christian will take away all their troubles and strifes should hopefully have realised that that is far removed from the truth and the joy of being a Christian is knowing that God is there with you in those difficulties loving and caring for you as you go through them.

Psalm 55: 22 is David's testimony to the fact that God will sustain you. David did so many things wrong during his life and yet he knew that God still loved and cared for him as he came before Him in true repentance and is able to say in this verse knowing it to be true in his own life:

“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall.”

In 2 Timothy 4:6-8 Paul acknowledges to Timothy the fact that he is dying but that he has endured the things that life has put before him and through all that has maintained his faith and looks forward to the promised reward of a crown of righteousness given to him by Jesus himself, but not only to him but also to all that have gone before and have fought the good fight and will receive the promised reward as well.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day – and not only to me but also to all who have longed for His appearing.”

We are following a path which has been trod by millions before us as they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, the road has been tough for many of them, not least the apostle Paul who recounts in 2 Corinthians 11: 16-31 the many sufferings that he endured because of his faith in Christ Jesus. Each of the disciples endured sufferings and cruel deaths, apart from John who died naturally, for the sake of their faith in Jesus Christ. We hear today of many martyrs who suffer huge hardship prior to being martyred for their faith. It is hard to hear and hard to endure but what is obvious is that they all considered it worthwhile and still continue to consider it worthwhile today or there would be no modern day martyrs and there are thousands each month. Hopefully none of us will be called upon to become martyrs for our faith but what is certain is that we will have to endure trials and tribulations in our lives and hopefully over the last few weeks we have been given some pointers to the things we need to be concentrating on to make us able to deal with and endure them better when they do come.

In Zephaniah 3:17 (Amplified version) we read these encouraging words:

“The Lord your God is in your midst. A Warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with joy; He will be quiet in His love(making no mention of your past sins) He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

God is with you – all the time

God saves – all the time

God rejoices over each one of us with joy – all the time

God will not condemn us for our past – all the time

God will rejoice over us with SHOUTS OF JOY – all the time

Because He loves and cares for us with an everlasting love and will pour out His grace and mercy over us whatever our circumstances. That is something worth believing in!

A phrase you will hear many times over the coming weeks and months is “It’s time to celebrate” . It very much follows on from what we have been talking about for the last few weeks where we have been recognising that whatever our circumstances are God is there with us and there are things that we can do to make sure that we are in the right place with God and have the right attitude towards God to allow him to help and guide us through the good times and more particularly the bad.

“It’s time to celebrate” as John tells us in the latest “Onwards” is a recognition that whatever is going on in the world around us or in our personal lives it shouldn’t stop us celebrating the fact that God is our Creator God and that He loves us so much that He sent Jesus, His one and only Son, as an atoning sacrifice for our sin to restore our relationship with Him and that we can now have that intimate relationship with God again because of that.

So whatever s happening in your life, whatever is happening in the world around us, whatever we think might happen in the future we should still be able “to celebrate” because God is still Lord of our lives, He is still inviting us to join Him in heaven when our mortal coil reaches its end, He’s still in control of His world despite our best efforts and He still loves us with a never ending love and always will.

Things worth celebrating, a God worth celebrating, a God worth inviting people around us to come and join us because it really is time to celebrate God’s love and grace and mercy which will still continue even if every else falls apart or hopefully if the world turns in repentance and seeks God afresh.

God is God and evermore shall be so, unchanging and steadfast.

Amen