



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG46: Growing The Church (4/6) *Growth In Suffering*

Acts 4:1-32

Home Group Study Notes

13th March 2011 - Revd Warner Pidgeon



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Ash Wednesday marked the beginning of Lent a time when Christians abstain from certain foods, as we remember Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness. What, if anything, might you be giving up for Lent this year? Is this *giving up* a helpful discipline for the Christian or should more emphasis be placed on things we could *do* during the period of Lent?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study Acts 4:1-32, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1) How has God blessed you in your life? Describe those blessings.

2) What is your response to this blessing: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me” (Matthew 5:11).

3) Can you talk about a time when you have suffered, faced threats or been ridiculed in front of others because of your Christian faith?

The reputation of Schools Ministry continues to increase in Billericay. Attendance at Remembrance Day continues to increase. People who are not believers often comment to me about how impressed they are with the good relationships that exist between the Churches in our town. Praise in the Park is usually very well received. Preaching Jesus peacefully in word and deed is our greatest defence. “See how those Christians love one another.” “Did you hear about what the Churches are doing for the unemployed?” Gossip the gospel! “Did you hear about that lady who was healed by Jesus?” ‘After further threats they let [Peter and John] go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened’ (Acts 4:21).

Principle Three: Pray for boldness when preaching the name of Jesus. After Peter and John’s release the believers raised their voices in prayer to God (4:24).

In the face of persecution, threats and imprisonment, did they pray for protection? Their prayer included this: “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness” (4:29). ‘After they prayed ...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly’ (4:31). As we pray for persecuted believers and for ourselves let’s pray for violence and threats and persecution to end; but before any of that pray for boldness. Pray that persecuted believers will boldly live out their faith in Jesus – in word and deed. Pray that the Lord will comfort and heal and provide for their needs. Pray first and foremost for boldness.

I remember feeling torn and confused when Simon Guillebaud in Burundi, Central Africa reported violence against him and Christians there. In his email he said we are not asking for protection. We know that violence and threats will come. What we ask for is boldness to preach the name of the Lord Jesus. In the UK we may now be experiencing a growth in suffering. In the future there may well be a big growth in suffering, but I also believe that if we remain faithful to Jesus then we will grow *through* that suffering.

Preaching Jesus will result in persecution. Preaching Jesus peacefully is our greatest defence. Pray for boldness to preach the name of Jesus.

In that same teaching Jesus said that “they will put some of you to death” (21:16) and that “men will hate you because of me” (21:17); but he also said that “by standing firm you will gain life” (21:19).

So here they are, Peter and John, after a night in jail, arrested because the religious leaders don’t like what they’ve been saying and doing – even though it’s been positive, encouraging and peaceful. They don’t focus on defending themselves. They don’t expect or enjoy freedom of expression and worship; but they seek to preach the name of Jesus (Acts 4:8-12).

As the book of Acts progresses, arrests, persecutions, threats and killings are all there (Acts 5:18, 5:33, 5:40, 6:12, 7:58-60, 8:1-3) including the stoning and murder of Stephen, and the systematic arrests ordered by Saul as he went from house to house dragging people off to prison.

I believe the book of Acts contains principles that were true in the early Church and which are true now.

Principle One: Preaching the name of Jesus in word and in deed will result in persecution. See above!

Principle Two: Preaching Jesus peacefully in word and deed is our greatest defence.

Saul, the man who viciously persecuted the early church, was himself converted to become a follower of Jesus. He changed his name to Paul and wrote much of the New Testament. Writing later to the Church in Rome he said this: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Romans 12:14). He also wrote, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:17-18); and he quoted Proverbs 25:21. “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink”.

Peter and John’s preaching about Jesus was clear and their deeds were good. Many heard and believed (4:4). Their reputation was increasing. Verse 16, “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle and we cannot deny it.”

4) What words or wisdom has God given you when you’ve been under threats or pressure because of your faith (Luke 21:15)?

5) Preaching Jesus peacefully in word and deed is our greatest defence. A good reputation goes a long way. In what ways does Emmanuel Church have a good reputation in the local community?

6) Will you undertake to pray first and foremost for boldness for yourself and others to preach Jesus in word and in deed (Acts 4:29-31)?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG46: Growing The Church (4/6) *Growth In Suffering*

Acts 4:1-32

Home Group Sermon Notes

13th March 2011 - Revd Warner Pidgeon

Why does God let people suffer? In particular, why do so many Christian believers suffer specifically because of their Christian faith? Is there a simple answer to why people die or are killed because of their faith? No, there is not; but equally there is no long, complex, theological answer either. We might well feel bewildered and we might hear preachers trying to give an answer and simply end up thinking to ourselves; “He doesn’t know, does he?” In your Sunday morning talks having recently considered growth in numbers, growth in depth, and growth in community – all things that we long for in the Church – we now come to growth in suffering; and I guess that none of us would wish for or pray for that! It is not an issue for simple pat answers.

I don’t have any of those; but it’s a real issue. The early Church faced persecution and suffering. Christians down the years have suffered because of their faith. Many still do in ways we cannot imagine.

People told lies about Jesus. Jesus was beaten, tortured and slowly executed because he remained true to God’s purposes for him. He rose from the dead as a visible sign of his victory over death; thank God; but his teaching contained warnings and promises regarding the future suffering that his disciples would face. On one occasion he was sitting down on the side of a mountain and he was telling his followers about the blessings that come with being a Christian. I’m sure we all want God to bless us! Blessed are those who mourn ...blessed are the meek ...blessed are the merciful ...blessed are the pure in heart and the peacemakers (Matthew 5: 1-9) but how about this: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness” (Matthew 5:10). Jesus also said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me” (Matthew 5:11).

I believe that if we truly want God to bless us, and if we want God to bless our Churches, to grow our churches in numbers and in depth, then part of that blessing will include persecution, insults and the spreading of lies about us because of our faith. Jesus said it would happen. It happened to him. It happened to the early Church and it still happens. I’m not saying I want it, and I’m not saying it’s about to happen, but we mustn’t be surprised when it comes.

In today’s Bible event we heard that sometime after the resurrection of Jesus and sometime after the Holy Spirit was poured out upon believers, Peter and John “were speaking to the people” (Acts 4:1). They were teaching “that the dead would be raised from death, just as Jesus had been raised from death” (4:2 CEV).

As far as the Jewish religious leaders were concerned, Peter and John were unauthorised preachers. The religious leaders arrested them because they believed (wrongly) that Peter and John were heretics; whereas the message of the Bible is that they were arrested as a direct result of teaching truth. People were listening to them and “many who heard the message believed” (4:4). The Church was growing in numbers. God was blessing the Church with growth, but at the same time came a wave of persecution. Peter and John were hauled before the religious leaders to explain how and why and by what name a cripple had been healed (4:5-7); but let’s just pause there a moment.

The gospel writer Luke is also the writer of the book of Acts (Acts 1:1 and Luke 1:3) and when he lists the group of people called together to question Peter and John we find that it is the same group who questioned Jesus before demanding his crucifixion (Luke 22:66) – same people, same place, and similar questions. At this point it is highly likely that Peter and John recalled the promise of Jesus that we find in Luke 21: 12-15: “They will lay hands on you and persecute you.

They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before Kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves; for I will give you words and wisdom”.