

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?

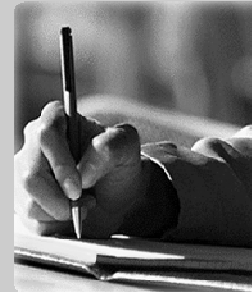


HG71: Transforming Presence (4/6)
Transforming Rule

Numbers 21:4-9 & Hebrews 3:1-6

Home Group Study Notes

10th June 2012 - Pauline Woolnough



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 (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

What is the best gift anyone has ever given you?



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, 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: Have there been people in your life who have influenced your walk with the Lord? What was it about them that helped you?

2: The Israelites complained about God, they thought that he had failed them. What is your most common complaint against God? In what ways do you feel he has failed you? (It will be difficult to be honest in thinking about this question)

3: What has God blessed you with in the last month or so that you are really grateful for?

we fix our eyes on Jesus, a quick look just is not sufficient, we are saved by accepting Christ as Saviour and it is by gazing on him, focusing on him and surrendering to His Holy Spirit that we are transformed.

I clearly remember a time of transformation, a time when everything changed for me, everything was different, *I* was different. Things that once were interesting to me became less so, and my favourite topic of conversation was Jesus. It happened in the early 80s when there was a move of the Holy Spirit in Billericay and in particular in St Mary's, where the church grew at a very fast rate. I believe that I was transformed along with the lives of others because a small number of people fixed their eyes on Jesus, they fixed their eyes on him not just for their own needs and for the joy that intimacy with him brings but to ask Him for a move and a fresh outpouring of His Holy Spirit so that people like me might come to know Him and be transformed. There is a song that we often sing, "I see the King of glory," and one of the lines say this- "*Break my heart with what breaks yours,*" and every time we sing it I am convicted by the Holy Spirit because I know that the thing that breaks his heart is the countless number of people that do not know Him, and I have little power myself to do much about it.

If you asked people what the church needs I expect many would say we need more clergy, we need more youth workers, we need more money, we may need all those things but there is only one absolute need that the church and its people have today and that is we *need* the Holy Spirit. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we need to pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and that is what I want to encourage you to do, in your groups and meetings. Praise begets praise, worship, both planned and spontaneous, and waiting on the Lord is liberating. We saw from the Pentecost service that we all have a need and desire for more of God, so let's be honest and discuss this in our groups and let's not hide and suppress that need until next year's service when we bring it out again. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives that real transformation comes, the first believers made little impact even though they had lived with Christ for 3 years. It was only with the Pentecostal experience and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into their lives that real transformation came, the once timid believers became entirely new men and women so that they could all with one voice say the "*Old things are passed away behold all things are become new.* 2 Cor 5 17. Jesus is God gift to us and it is His Holy Spirit that is able to transform us for the glory of Christ.

**Living God,
Draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us
To live your love with generosity and joy, imagination and courage;
For the sake of your world and in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

The questions for discussion are among those posed in the Transforming Presence Paper and the answers will inform our on-going discussion. Discuss as many of them in your group as time permits (*It would be helpful if Home Group Leaders feed back any comments to Paul, Tom or Shirley or your churchwardens, Don and Linda*).

In the end it became an idol to which people were sacrificing, and eventually superstition and magic took over from faith. It ceased to fulfill its purpose of drawing people to the grace of the one true God. In the end King Hezekiah who trusted only in the Lord destroyed it (2 Kings 18:4). What had happened was that although the people continued to look at the bronze snake on the pole, they missed God, they looked but didn't see. We can all look at something without really seeing. The writer to the Hebrews warns us against this in Hebrews 3 1-6, "*Brothers who are dedicated to God, you who are sharers in heaven's calling, because of all this you must fix your eyes on him whom our creed holds to be the apostle and the high priest of God, I mean Jesus.*"

The word he uses for to "fix your eyes" - *katanoein*, is significant and full of meaning, it doesn't simply mean to glance at, or to notice something. It means to fix our attention on something in such a way that we understand its inner meaning and that we learn any lesson that it is designed to teach. If we are to learn and grow, a detached look at Jesus is not enough there must be a concentrated gaze where we spend time with Him focusing our minds in a determined effort to see Him. The initial covenant that God made with his people in Ex 24 1-8 was one where he offered them a unique relationship with them if they obeyed the law. Now he tells them that their safety is guaranteed if they look at the bronze snake, both things that the people couldn't manage to do, they were unable to keep their side of the agreements that God made with them, and so God was no longer held to his side of the agreement.

God Promises Life: We of course now live under a new covenant with God, although at times we live as if we are still bound by the old, believing that if we do more God will love us more and if we follow this rule and fail to break another then we are saved. No the new covenant is completely different. The old covenant depended on the peoples obedience to laws imposed on them, but now people will obey God because they love him not because they fear the law and its consequences if it is broken. The new covenant brings forgiveness, our sins will be not only be forgiven but God will forget them, the new relationship is based entirely on God's love, human effort is meaningless, it is based solely on the grace of God and makes our relationship with God no longer dependent on our obedience but entirely on God's love.

The covenant that Jesus brings in cancelled out the old one, and this covenant is for everyone, one to unite all peoples, the doors that had been shut are now wide open. However we must remember that the covenant we enter into with God is not one of equals. We do not come to God on equal terms, we cannot bargain with God or change anything about the offer he makes to us, he gives and we receive. He offers and we receive with belief and faith.

God Promises Transformation: Jesus is God's ultimate gift to humanity, and when he left the earth to return to heaven he promised never to leave us alone, he left His Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of Jesus who is able to transform lives and situations and offer us relationship with the Father. It is an offer so beautiful and complete and which cost Jesus so much our hearts must surely be so totally overcome with love and gratitude to the one who made it possible. Just as the Hebrews were told to look at the bronze snake so must

4: What does this story from the journeying of the Israelites tell us about our Christian journey?

5: How can we prevent the helpful symbols of God's grace (churches; icons; the Bible; even the bread and wine of the Holy Communion) becoming idols?

6: We are always being encouraged to have quiet times and wait on God. When we do we always reap benefits so: a) why do we find it so hard to do? b) its always easier to do this with others so spend some time now in corporate silent prayer remembering to come to God in sorrow for the times you have 'complained' about him, and thank him for the gifts and blessings he has given you.



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



HG71: Transforming Presence (4/6) *Transforming Rule*

Numbers 21:4-9 & Hebrews 3:1-6

Home Group Sermon Notes

10th June 2012 - Pauline Woolnough

God Promised Safety: Deut 12:10 says: *But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and he will give you rest from your enemies so that you will live in safety.* This was God's gift to his people, to live in safety, that was the plan, but very soon after leaving Egypt the people started to complain. There was no water for a start, in the chapter before (Numbers 20) we see God telling Moses to speak to the limestone rock and water would come out but in his anger Moses struck the rock, the water came out but because of this act of distrust and disobedience God declared that Moses would never lead the people into the promised land. They were cut off from God's blessings and all that he had in store for them, was saved for another generation.

For 40 long yrs the people had been wandering in the wilderness, they were nomads. Moses had led the people out of Egypt with the intention of taking them into the Promised Land but the journey had not gone as they had expected. The people were tired and battle weary, and they had had enough. They didn't have a land to call their own, which meant that they were still sleeping in tents and worse, they'd been eating the same food all this time, with no variation in the menu, apart from the occasional quail. v5 *"There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food."*

They were so close they could almost see the land, in fact they had been going round in circles, we know this because right at the beginning of the reading it says that *"From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea..."* the same Red Sea that God parted when they escaped Egypt, that was 40 yrs ago, and during that time they had eaten the same manna and slept in tents. They complained to Moses. *"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?"* and they began to criticize and question God. The people had had enough, but so had God. You might find yourself identifying and sympathising with the people but God didn't sympathise. He didn't reassure them or pacify them or tell them to hang on because it wouldn't be long. He did something rather bizarre. Just when the people thought things couldn't get much worse He sent poisonous snakes into their camps to bite them and as a result a lot of the people died what was probably a horrible death. Bad things happening always get our attention so snakes was a good choice, because this certainly refocused the people. They appealed to Moses to intervene on their behalf before the Lord, saying, *"Pray that the Lord will take away the snakes away from us."* I suppose when it's a choice of manna or snakes, manna begins to look fairly appealing once more.

God Promised Healing: God heard the cries of the people and he forgave them but look at how he did it. He didn't remove the snakes, they stayed where they were, instead He had Moses make a model of the very thing the people feared. They were forced to look on a snake as their source of help as Moses was instructed to raise up a bronze one on a pole so that whenever a person was bitten, all they had to do was to look at the snake and they would live. The bronze snake that Moses held up offered healing, it offered life, if they turned their attention from the snakes and looked upon the replica they would live. God keeps his promises, He is a covenant making God and he always keeps his side of the agreement but the covenants he makes with his people have conditions on them. The people had to look upon the bronze snake with the belief that with that look would come healing. That bronze snake itself had no healing power, it was not some miraculous cure. It was a sign of God's promise that he would heal them if they looked and believed. Without God's promise, the bronze snake was just some inanimate rather unpleasant looking object.

God's Promise is Jesus: God's promise was the gift of life and a sign to the people that he would hear and heal when they took their eyes off the snakes and focus their gaze on Him. It is a really strange image but of course it is a picture foretelling the coming of God Himself in the Person of Christ, the very Giver of Life and an image that Jesus picked up in John's gospel when he was speaking with Nicodemus. There he used the image as a powerful picture of what he was to do on the cross—read John 3:14-16.

Jesus provided the way for us to be healed from sin's deadly bite and there are parallels that can be drawn between the snake on the pole and Jesus. First, the bronze snake looked like a real snake but it had no venom, there was no poison in it, it was just a solid bronze snake. Christ took on our human nature and became like us, he looked like us but similarly, in him there was no trace of the venom or poison of sin that is in us.

Secondly, it was simply a bronze snake, not a beautifully crafted piece of work made out of precious metals yet God used this as a channel to heal and draw people to himself, and so Jesus our splendid, magnificent, glorious Jesus left all the riches of heaven to come to earth, to become like us. Is 53:2 says that *"he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."* Jesus shared in our earthly experience and lived clothed in vulnerable human flesh and blood and by doing so those of us who look on Him with faith and believe, will be saved from the deadly effects of sin, which is death and we will have eternal life.

A bronze snake at the top of a pole brought the Israelites healing through God's promises. By gazing on it the threat of death from the snakes was removed. Christ brought us healing through hanging on a cross. His perfect suffering and death have paid for all sin and it no longer has the power to kill us, we no longer face certain death because he has paid the ultimate price and provided the only antidote for sin's poison. Just as the snake on the pole was the only antidote for Israelites who were fatally bitten, so Christ on the cross is the only remedy for souls infected by sin. The people took the image of the snake very seriously. It was a sign and a symbol of God's promise of help and healing and they carried that bronze snake around for about eight centuries, wherever they went, polishing it, preserving it, even worshipping it.