



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?

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HG117: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season
FAITHFULNESS: Love's Confidence

Revelation 3:12-22 & James 2:14-22

Home Group Study Notes

24 January 2016 - Revd David Bagwell



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

Share examples of things you have experienced this week that have been OK, but could have been even better. If possible, share an experience of something that exceeded your expectations.



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 the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: What does the phrase 'A pillar of the Church' mean for you? What are helpful doors into the worship life of the church? What things have you or others found unhelpful?

2: What might it mean to be a church like Philadelphia that has little power but is still faithful?

3: What did you find helpful or unhelpful about the illustration of a door that is ajar, being neither one thing nor the other, and therefore unfit for purpose?

Matthew's Gospel – a Manual for Practical Discipleship

For Matthew, Abraham was a key figure, and in his writings he mentions Abraham in the very first verse of the gospel. Jesus - a descendant of David himself a descendant of Abraham. Matthew then goes on in his gospel to give us the teaching of Jesus in great detail – but not so that we might know and learn what to believe, but that as a disciple we might know what to do - to follow Christ and in the process of doing learn all that we need to know.

There is stuff that you can learn by rote and remember and perhaps reproduce for an exam. I once learnt sufficient Latin to pass an exam but apart from *amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant* I have now forgotten it all. There is other stuff that you can only learn through experience, how to actually love for instance, how to love your neighbour as yourself, how to love when it's difficult even to like - for that kind of learning you have to be like an apprentice learning on the job, learning through your mistakes, being out there living in the real world, not buried in your books.

The process of learning to follow Christ is much more like being an apprentice and much less like being a student. Which is good news for those who aren't that academic, but bad news for those who find the remembering so much easier than the application.

Confidence in Love

Faithfulness is in this series described as Love's confidence – By that I think we mean that Faithfulness gives us confidence in Love - not only in God's power and love but also in our ability to love – we become confident enough to try and live out love in action and not just talk about it. Faithfulness as a fruit of the spirit to quote Galatians 5 gives us the ability to control our lives and do what is right. To move beyond the theory and the guilt that we may feel at our inability to follow it through. And so it is that in faithful living we give glory to God by bearing much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures and we become and show ourselves to be disciples of Jesus.

Conclusion - the Doors and the Pillars of Revelation 3.

Pillars are fine, but doors are where the action is. Standing firm in the faith is good, but faithful living is even better. How can we be better doors, doors that are not ajar, but flung open wide to welcome Christ and others in. If you are currently hedging your bets and not yet fully open to the spirit of God, or in some way closed to what he is asking of you, then this day, without delay, pray for the fruits of the spirit.

Earnestly pray and turn from your lukewarm approach to being faithful and listen carefully for the one who still stands at the door and knocks waiting to be invited in. And in particular pray for faithfulness, the faithfulness of Abraham who demonstrated his faith not so much in what he believed to be true but in what he was then prepared to do, and with that kind of faithfulness - re-read the gospel of Christ, and all its familiar stories and words of wisdom, reading them now not just as a pattern of belief, but as a manual for living, a guide for those who want to learn and then practice the skills and attitudes necessary to be faithful followers of Jesus. And in all things give the glory and praise to the one who has been faithful to us, and who has faith in us to be the people we need to be. *Amen.*

Church Text for 2016

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last.”

John 15:16

The story of Abraham's Faithfulness

Abraham... at the age of 75... is well settled into his retirement, pipe and slippers are the order of the day, when God comes to him and in Genesis Chapter 12 verses 1-4 we read this The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing. ... and so when Abram was seventy-five years old, he started out from Haran, as the LORD had told him to do; and Lot went with him. That is faithfulness – he trusts God to up root and move at a time when you and I would want to settle down and take things easy.

But the story doesn't end there - Jump forward to Chapter 16 and Abram is still waiting for God to keep his promise – he's now aged 85 - he been waiting for over ten years for this promised child – and not surprisingly he's getting a little bit impatient. Abram with the blessing of his wife decides to move things along a bit – he has an affair with Hagar their slave and she gives birth to a son called Ishmael. Not so faithful towards God – but God is still faithful to Abraham – there's still plenty of time as far as God is concerned to do all that needs to be done.

Another 14 years pass by. Abram is now 99 years old. God appears to him again and promises him a child by Sarah his wife. In Chapter 17 – we have Abraham saying, "Wouldn't it be simpler to just work with the illegitimate child I already have by Hagar, as Sarah is well past child bearing – 'No,' says God - "Your wife Sarah will bear you a son and you will name him Isaac. My covenant is with him and with his descendants. Sarah isn't so sure any of this is physically possible, but Abraham believed and trusted God and in Chapter 21 we read The LORD blessed Sarah, as he had promised, and she became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham.... The boy was born at the time God had said he would be born and Abraham named him Isaac. But the real faithfulness of Abraham is yet to come.

We estimate that Abraham is now at least 105, and God asks him this in Chapter 22 - "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love so much, and go to the land of Moriah. There on a mountain that I will show you, offer him as a sacrifice to me." And Abraham despite his age and infirmity goes to Moriah and makes the preparations as his young son innocently asks him - "Father! I see that you have the coals and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" But just as he is about to sacrifice Isaac the very source of his faith, God stops him and says through his angel - "Don't hurt the boy or do anything to him And God goes on to say - Because you did this and did not keep back your only son from me, I promise that I will give you as many descendants as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand along the seashore. There is no doubt that Abraham believed in God, but the ultimate sign of his faithfulness is not what he believed, but what he did as result of his belief.

James 2 verse 14 onwards

'My friends, what good is it for one of you to say that you have faith if your actions do not prove it? Can that faith save you? if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead. But someone will say, "One person has faith, another has actions." My answer is, "Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions." ...How was our ancestor Abraham put right with God? It was through his actions, when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. Can't you see? His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions. ... You see, then, that it is by our actions that we are put right with God, and not by our faith alone.' We are saved by faith and not by works, but our faith is revealed to be real and living by our actions. Faithfulness that includes no actions is dead.

4: Why does Jesus respect our freedom to say no and not barge in even when the door is half open? Why does he stand at the door and knock?

5: In hearing the story of Abraham again, what did you identify with? What if any aspect of the story did you hear in a new way?

6: We are saved by faith and not by works, but our faith is revealed to be real and living by our actions. Do you agree and if so what implications does this have for the process of being saved? What have you learnt through direct experiences ?



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



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Revelation 3:12-22 & James 2:14-22

Home Group Sermon Notes

24 January 2016 - Revd David Bagwell

Pillars and Doors

There's a lot of talk about doors and pillars in our main reading from Revelations 3. Pillars that are victorious, doors that are being knocked on by one who stands outside waiting to be invited in. Ever seen yourself as a pillar, a pillar of the church, or has someone else described you in that way? One who holds it all together, without you the whole thing would come tumbling down? Or if not a pillar, do you see yourself more as a door - if so what kind of door - a door that is open, open to the spirit - a door that is open to others, a means by which someone might come just a little bit closer. Or are you a door that is sometimes closed, closed to others or closed to new ideas - a door that is at times locked shut as we do each night when in the darkness, we are determined to protect what we have from the stranger who might break in and take what we have away. There's obviously more to this analogy than meets the eye. And when we apply it to the church as a whole it gets even more interesting - What does it mean for us to be a pillar of the establishment or a door into a fresh expression of church to use two current phrases?

Revelation 3

The Book of Revelation has some words for the churches and direct and challenging words they are as the spirit identifies both their strengths and their weaknesses. We have two particular churches referred to in our reading today from Revelation chapter 3.

A Word to the Church in Philadelphia

We began our reading with the closing words to the church in Philadelphia - they have previously been described as a church has little power, but they have followed the teaching of Jesus and been faithful. And because of that doors have opened in front of them - doors which we are told will not now be closed. Yes there are problems in the church in Philadelphia- in particular the small matter of the 'group that belongs to Satan', but even they we are told will one day see the error of their ways - and those that stay faithful to the end, those that are faithful in their Christian living will be 'victorious pillars in the temple.' So the message seems to be that faithful living leads to God's reward - which is to be a pillar of the temple.

And what is this temple that is being spoken of. Well we need to link this passage with the words of Jesus about the temple. In John 2: 19-22 Jesus, anticipating his death and resurrection, spoke of the temple being torn down and rising again, John says that he is talking about his body, and elsewhere the body of Christ is described as the church. So the temple in Revelation 3 is nothing less than the body of Christ, the worldwide church, that is growing the kingdom of God on earth as it is already in heaven. So being a pillar is a good thing, God is using us to build a better world.

A Word to the Church in Laodicea

But the second church referred to in this passage is the church in Laodicea. They are described as lukewarm - neither hot nor cold. , and because they are neither hot nor cold, they are of no use in building the kingdom - 'I am going to spit you out of my mouth' is the way Revelation 3:16 puts it! We didn't quite do that when we had a meal at a local pub last week, but when the requested iced water at the start and the hot coffee at the end were both lukewarm, we were to put it mildly a bit disappointed. But rather than start up a whole new set of analogies on food and drink, let's stick with the ones we already have - to do with doors.

When is a Door not a Door?

The answer of course being..... when it's ajar. Now in this instance that's not just a humorous play on words - it's also a profound statement about a door that has forgotten its primary purpose. A door that is ajar is a door that is half open or half shut depending on how you look at it. Being half open is no use to those who would want to come in, unless they are very very thin - being half shut is no use to those who would want to keep everyone out, unless they are very very fat, 'You are neither one thing nor the other', says the Lord. 'You are a door that is ajar', 'you are lukewarm' you are unfit for purpose

Doors Need to be Wide Open

'Listen !', says Jesus, 'I stand at the door and knock; if any hear my voice and open the door, I will come into their house and eat with them, and they will eat with me.' The door in this passage needs to be opened wide for it is the means by which Jesus might enter in and have fellowship with us. That desire to have real fellowship and not just a passing acquaintance, that desire to 'abide with us' to quote John 15, one of the passages that Paul is preaching on right now at Western Road, is indicated by the image of eating together. Jesus wants to come in, to live with us and in us, but our invitation is half hearted, cool, lukewarm, the door is at best ajar - it is certainly not open wide. What does Jesus do when faced with a door that though not shut is only ajar, well like any polite visitor, one who always respects our freedom to say no - he doesn't just push his way in, he waits to be invited in, he knocks and waits for the door to be properly opened. 'Hello, anybody in?' Is the kind of thing he might say - and if he gets no reply, then he waits a bit longer, before eventually moving on. It seems that with the Christians at Laodicea he's been waiting rather a long time. 'I'd be clearer where I stand (no pun intended), he says ' and whether I should keep on knocking or move on - if you had slammed the door in my face, '

Love's Confidence?

Galatians 5 is the key passage about the fruits of the spirit - where we read these words - The Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things as these. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death their human nature with all its passions and desires. The Spirit has given us life; he must also control our lives. The spirit has given us life - that's the theory to turn that theory into practice he must also begin to control what we do.

The Spirit has given us life, the means of living life to the full, The Spirit must now control our lives. In other words, this list of nine fruits is not just a list of things we need to remember - and in that we are helped in no small way by the old song the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace etc. No the fruits of the spirit are a list of things to do. And we demonstrate the truth of what we believe not by remembering the list, or even singing it, but by living each fruit and reaping the particular harvest that it brings.