



# I BELIEVE



## THE APOSTLES' CREED

**EXPLAINING / EXAMINING / EXPLORING**  
**ALL THAT GOD PROMISES US IN THE GOSPEL**  
**SO WE BELIEVE**

## GROWING & GOING

/AS FAMILY  
/AS FOLLOWERS  
/IN PRAYER

/WITH THE  
/GOOD NEWS  
/OF JESUS

# I BELIEVE

We're using the Apostles' Creed to EXPLAIN, EXAMINE & EXPLORE all the God promises us in the gospel so we believe.

As well as Sunday sermons we want to provide you with further resources **so that we can continue to GROW together as the family of God, as followers of Jesus, and in prayer and GO with the good news of Jesus to the world around us**

## REMEMBER

Each week there is a memory verse so that we can store up God's word in our heart (Psalm 119:11)

## REJOICE

Each week there is a song that helps us rejoice in a truth about God, who he is and what he has done.

## READ

Each week there are daily readings to do on your own or with others. These will explore what we were thinking about on Sundays. So read the TEXT, work through the THOUGHT and then put the THEREFORE into action.

## RECITE

We're also going to be using the Heidelberg catechism to help us as we work our way through the Creed, so each week there'll be a question from the catechism for you to recite as well!

# WEEK 1

I BELIEVE...

HEBREWS 10:38-11:2

## REMEMBER

NOW FAITH IS CONFIDENCE  
IN WHAT WE HOPE FOR  
AND ASSURANCE  
ABOUT WHAT WE DO NOT SEE

**HEBREWS 11:1**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

THIS I BELIEVE / HILLSONG

## RECITE

What, then, must a Christian believe?

All that God promises us in the gospel, which the articles of our undoubted Christian faith, confessed throughout the world in the Apostles' Creed, teach us in a summary.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM  
QUESTION 22**

# WEEK 1 / READING 1

## **Text - Romans 1:16-17**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed –a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

## **Thought - Salvation**

Don't you love those moments of tension in a movie where someone is hanging over the edge of a bridge or a cliff. They realise they're in trouble, and then they hear a voice, "Take my hand." They know there's someone reaching over the edge to save them. Will they believe that they can save them, and will that belief "that" become belief "in" that leads them to let go of their own grip and take hold of the grip of the one who will save them.

The righteous will live by faith, Paul tells us here. Which implies that without faith we're in trouble. And we need to realise it. And then faith comes in.

What's the faith we will live by? Well it's knowing the gospel, believing that it is true and then believing in the one who reaches down to us and says "Take my hand"

The Apostle's Creed is a summary of all that God has powerfully promised in the gospel to save people who can't save themselves.

## **Therefore**

So today, take some time to read the Apostles Creed...read the information. If you're not a Christian, hear an invitation, "Take my hand". If you are a Christian, take some time showing your appreciation to God, Father, Son and Spirit in prayer and worship.

# WEEK 1 / READING 2

## **Text - Hebrews 10:19-23**

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

## **Thought - Sin**

I wonder what you tend to do when you sin against someone...and they know all about it...whether it's losing your temper, gossiping, stealing, whatever it is. I should clarify that I'm not asking how you sin...I don't need the details...but how you respond to the sense of guilt afterwards.

I imagine lots of you are like me in that a guilty conscience pulls you away from the person you've hurt...you put distance between you, and you maybe start to try and do things to make up for it. For it's disappearing to another room and folding clothes or tidying up...

But if the person truly loves us, we should be able to draw near to them and ask forgiveness. And this is the point of today's passage. Jesus, in dying on our behalf means we can actually draw near to God despite our guilty consciences...whether that be for the first time or day by day as a follower of Jesus. There is no guilt that requires distance from God...and there is no guilt that can make up for, only Jesus can do (and has done( that).

## **Therefore**

So if a guilty conscience is your companion today, don't let it keep you at a distance from God. Have confidence in Jesus work on the cross. Have confidence in God's faithfulness. Have confidence in the one your faith is in. And draw near.

# WEEK 1 / READING 3

## **Text - Matthew 5:10-11 / Hebrews 11:1**

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

## **Thought - Suffering**

So are you a fan of reboots...you know, new versions of old classics... like the Planet of the Apes series of films (big fan) or maybe you've been spending your recent Saturday evenings watching the new Gladiators series.

I've avoided it as I didn't think I could cope with anymore cringe, but ended up watching the final (it wasn't my fault!). One of the challenges was The Gauntlet where you had to get past four human piles of muscle upon muscle, armed with weapons. The prize was points! And so two challengers endured pain and insults and pressure and pushback to win the prize.

In one sense the Christian life is a gauntlet, not with gladiators but sin and suffering and Satan, seeking to stop us...but we have a prize promised to us, we have the Spirit with us, we have the way guaranteed for us. And so faith, is not just looking back and seeing with what Christ has done, it is looking forward with confidence and assurance in what we cannot see...yet...what he is doing and what he will do...no matter what pugel stick hits we take to the head on our way!

## **Therefore**

If you feel your faith is more backward looking, ask the Holy Spirit to incubate a confident and assured forward looking faith in you also

# WEEK 1 / READING 4

## **Text - Hebrews 12:1-3**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

## **Thought - Surrounded**

During the week, we went to watch Micah run for his school cross-country team at a very blustery and muddy Mallusk. 1.8km later kids came across the finish line splashed with mud, one girl in her socks carrying one trainer, the other forever lost somewhere along the route.

I was amazing to see the bursts of energy as they hit the final stretches surrounded by parents and teachers and classmates cheering them on from the side lines...“You can do it!” Kids who looked like they might not make it had sudden bursts of energy and sprinted across the finish line.

Hebrews reminds us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, followers of Jesus who have gone before, cheering us on. But more importantly than telling us, “You can do it!” they are pointing us to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith and saying, “He has done it! He has cleared the way, he has won the race for us!” and so we run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

## **Therefore**

So maybe on your race at the minute, you’re thinking, “I can’t do it... It’s too far, too muddy...I’m too tired!” Remember that Jesus has already run and won this race on your behalf, so today, fix your eyes on him, listen to the cheer of the crowd around you and simply put one foot in front of the other in perseverance and faith.

# WEEK 1 / READING 5

## **Text - John 3:1-8**

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

## **Thought - Spirit**

Have you ever been in the position where an event or a happening depends entirely on you? The pressure is intense! And sometimes we put that pressure on ourselves when it comes to the big E word... evangelism...it all depends on us!

We do play our part, Jesus wants us to go and tell and share and shine and live and love...we want to be able to tell people what we believe in the gospel(the Apostles' Creed might come in handy)...so they have knowledge, we might even be able to convince them that it's true...but the conviction that leads to a heart-felt trust and assurance is created in people by the Holy Spirit through the gospel as people hear it and read it and see it lived out in our lives.

The fact that this is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring spiritual life to people through the gospel lifts the pressure off us but it should lead us to more and more dependent prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help

people see and hear and know and believe and trust the gospel as we speak it and show it.

### **Therefore**

We're only two words down in our series on the Apostle's Creed...I believe...but maybe you might want to aim to learn it all in the weeks ahead...and pray for opportunities to share it with those people you'd love to come to faith...and pray for the Holy Spirit to help them move from knowledge to believing it's true to trusting in the good news of Jesus.

# WEEK 2

GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY  
CREATOR OF HEAVEN & EARTH  
NEHEMIAH 9:5-6 (READ THE WHOLE CHAPTER)

## REMEMBER

YOU ALONE ARE THE LORD. YOU MADE THE HEAVENS, EVEN THE HIGHEST HEAVENS, AND ALL THEIR STARRY HOST, THE EARTH AND ALL THAT IS ON IT, THE SEAS AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. YOU GIVE LIFE TO EVERYTHING AND THE MULTITUDES OF HEAVEN WORSHIP YOU.

**NEHEMIAH 9:6**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

KING FOREVERMORE / AARON KEYES

## RECITE

Q. What do you believe when you say "I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing made heaven and earth and all that is in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ his Son. I trust him so much, that I do not doubt that whatever I need for body and soul he will provide; and whatever hardships he sends me in this life of sorrow, he will turn to my good. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM  
QUESTION 26**

# WEEK 2 / READING 1

## **Text - Nehemiah 9:6 / Psalm 24:1-2**

You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.

## **Thought**

There was high drama in the FA Cup semi-final on Sunday (some of you have switched off already...but stay with me, I'm more interested in the fans than the football today!) And you had a stadium full of fans singing their hearts out...singing to their heroes...worshipping them you could almost say...and singing about their heroes...declaring to the opposition fans how great their star players were.

In these two passages we have the heavens singing to God and shouting about God. The multitudes of heaven worship the God who created everything. And the heavens in all their splendour declare the glory of the God who created them.

We simply need to emulate the heavens...we worship God as the creator of heaven and earth, and we declare his glory. Our very existence, our flesh and blood in all its amazing complexity diversity proclaim the work of his hands...and heart and the head and the lungs and the mouths that we've been given also are to pour forth speech and reveal knowledge as we worship and tell of the God who made us...and as we'll get into more next week, the Father Almighty who loves us.

## **Therefore**

So today, tonight, have a look at the clouds and sun and moon and stars and just listen to what they're telling you about the God who made them...and respond in worship.

# WEEK 2 / READING 2

## **Text - Nehemiah 9:9-12**

"You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.

## **Thought**

If you're broken down on the motorway you need someone to help you (unless you're James!) You might see an AA van approaching, but because you don't have AA membership, their ability to help is cancelled by the lack of willingness. You might have a good samaritan stop, who like me, is a kind soul, but who couldn't tell the difference between a spark plug and an ear plug...their desire to help is cancelled out by their lack of ability.

You need desire and ability...which is what we see in today's section of the prayer in Nehemiah...as the people recall God's rescue of them from Egypt. They remember his ability in signs and wonders and splitting the sea. And they remember that he willingly responded to their cry for help.

And this is one example of the deep truth, framed so well by the Heidelberg Catechism...when it comes to God providing for us and working good for us even from hardships, "he is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father."

## **Therefore**

What needs do you have right now? What hardships are you facing right now. Ask the Holy Spirit to incubate your faith in the God who is able and who desires to work for your good.

# WEEK 2 / READING 3

## **Text - Nehemiah 9:13-14**

"You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses. In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.

## **Thought**

As the people remember in prayer God's affection and his ability, they also remember God's direction and his authority.

After rescuing them from Egypt and bringing them through the Red Sea, he led them to Mount Sinai, where he came down and spoke to them from heaven. The King of creation is the king with authority, who has the right to give regulations and laws to his creation.

And in case we think that God is some oppressive dictator, his regulations and laws are just and right, his decrees and commands are good.

Keeping God's commands is less about attempting to be good, and more about recognising that they are good and they are for our good. It's not that we shouldn't try to keep them, but our trying must be underpinned by our trusting in his authority as good.

## **Therefore**

Psalms 119 is a long...a very long...meditation on how good God's law is. Maybe as we think about the good he gives us in his law, these two verses might be worth considering

18. Open my eyes that I may see  
wonderful things in your law.

68. You are good, and what you do is good;  
teach me your decrees

# WEEK 2 / READING 4

## **Text - Nehemiah 9:19-21**

“Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.

## **Thought**

As I've read through this prayer in Nehemiah, it's been amazing to see how many aspects of God, Father Almighty creator of heaven and earth have been shown to us as they move from creation into their remembrance of God's rescue of his people from Egypt.

His providence (how he works his almighty power to achieve what he purposes), his authority and now today it's his provision as he gives to his people what they needed...guidance, his good Spirit, manna, water, even the clothes on their back and the sandals on their feet.

Now this isn't a promise that you'll never have to buy new clothes or shoes if you're a Christian (it'd be handy if it did as long as your happy with saving money but dressing increasingly out of fashion... until those dodgy clothes of your came back in fashion again). But it a reminder that God, Father Almighty can and will provide what we need.

As Jesus said, “ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them....And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you— you of little faith?

**Therefore**

So if this is an area where you feel your someone of little faith, read again of God's provision in the wilderness, read again Jesus words, and ask the Holy Spirit to incubate your faith, and to grow it.

# WEEK 2 / READING 5

## **Text - Nehemiah 9:25**

They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they revelled in your great goodness.

## **Thought - Spirit**

The journey to the promised land was to be a journey back to an Eden like land...now that didn't quite work out as you'll see if you keep reading the prayer in Nehemiah as the people repeatedly reject God and find themselves taken captive and eventually taken into exile.

But as the people arrive, before they wrecked everything again, we see a glimpse of how we're supposed to enjoy God's good creation...there are so many good things that come from God...now olives or even fruit might not be on your faves list...and so it isn't a bad thing to sometimes revel in God's great goodness.

Of course we do that every day as we enjoy his grace and his goodness in the fact that we are forgiven and free and have lie to the full. But we can also enjoy, revel in the created goodness all around us...whether that's food, people, places...a meal, conversation, a walk.

And in doing that we do what we were created to do. A different catechism question to finish this week with...

Q. What is man's chief end?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever

## **Therefore**

Some people slightly amend that to say that we glorify God by enjoying him forever...so in what way might you glorify God this weekend by taking time to intentionally and unashamedly enjoy his good creation within his good ways?

# WEEK 3

GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY  
CREATOR OF HEAVEN & EARTH

**1 JOHN 3:1-3**

## REMEMBER

SEE WHAT GREAT LOVE  
THE FATHER HAS LAVISHED ON US,  
THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED  
CHILDREN OF GOD!  
AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE!

**1 JOHN 3:1**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

GRACE ALONE / DUSTIN CENSURE

## RECITE

Q. What do you believe when you say "I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing made heaven and earth and all that is in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, **is my God and Father** because of Christ his Son. I trust him so much, that I do not doubt that whatever I need for body and soul he will provide; and whatever hardships he sends me in this life of sorrow, he will turn to my good. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM  
QUESTION 26**

# WEEK 3 / READING 1

## **Text - Galatians 3:26-27,4:4-7**

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ...But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

## **Thought**

The good news of Jesus is no less than the fact that he comes to save us from our sins...God sends his son to redeem us!

But there is more...

...because he redeems us so that he can receive us into his family.

So I can't get away from this quote we use on Sunday...

"Adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel. The traitor is forgiven, brought in for supper, and given the family name. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater." J.I. Packer

And maybe this seems too good to be true, but Paul is clear...in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. And God has send "the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." to help us live clearly in this reality.

Believing in the good news of Jesus, you become a beloved child of God, and will be one forever.

## **Therefore**

Ask the Spirit to help you believe that this is true, that in Jesus you are right with Gd the Judge AND loved and cared for by God the Father

# WEEK 3 / READING 2

## **Text - Romans 8:14-17**

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

## **Thought**

John Piper says it is a spectacular and scary promise, being heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

The spectacular is what we will inherit, the "all things" that Christ will inherit (Hebrews 1:2) and that we now share...just think on that!

The scary is the suffering that we will share in in order "that we may also share in his glory." That may be persecution in a world that hates God...it certainly will be the pain that comes from living in a world disconnected from God and in rebellion against him, the suffering this world give us in physical and emotional pain through the breakdown of relationships and our bodies, in tragedy and loss.

Yet the promise comes from the Father who also promises to protect us (read Psalm 121) and guide us (read Psalm 23) and work all things, even our suffering, for our good (read Romans 8:18-30).

And the path of suffering that leads to glory has already been walked by the Son, who has defeated the very things that seek to scare us and stop us, even death and the Devil themselves.

And the Paraclete (not parakeet...it's a fancy Greek name for the Holy Spirit that means comforter or counsellor and keeps up with the "p" s...promise, path, paraclete) helps us to keep these things in mind so that we might keep going in perseverance, endurance, faith and

hope...knowing that the glory of the spectacular far outweighs the grimness of the scary!

### **Therefore**

So in whatever the "scary" is for you today, ask the Holy Spirit to help you run with perseverance the race marked out for you today, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, for the spectacular joy the Father has promised to you (Hebrews 12:1-2), shared with you by the Son (Romans 8:17) and sealed for you by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14)

# WEEK 3 / READING 3

## **Text - Matthew 6:9-13**

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.'

## **Thought**

Have you ever wrapped up something really silly/boring/gross and give it to someone else in place of their real birthday or Christmas present. You might have done it as a joke, but you wouldn't do it for real. In the sermon on the mount (which is full of Jesus reminding us that God is our Father) Jesus reminds his followers that God is the greatest Father.

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

And so we're invited not just to be conscious that God is a good Father working for our good, but to come to him as Father...in prayer, to speak to him (he is "Our Father")...spend time with him (when you pray, not if)...to ask of him (for good gifts).

## **Therefore**

How much does the realisation that God is your Father through Jesus affect your day to day reality...in terms of how you come to him and pray to "Our Father." Take some time today to do that.

# WEEK 3 / READING 4

## Text - Mark 1:9-11

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

## Thought

Ok, so be honest...who has ever posted something on Facebook, Instagram, etc and has spent far too much energy checking it for the likes, the ❤️s, the 😂s and the 👍s. We love affirmation, but the world we live in makes us earn it, work for it...which often means we need to fake it, filter it or fabricate it.

Which is exhausting 😞

Yet our union with Christ takes away all our effort and all our exhaustion. One writer we quoted on Sunday said, ""By the Spirit we are immersed into the life of Jesus so that we come to share in his position before God"

And so in the baptism of Jesus we see one aspect of his position before God...affirmation and delight and pleasure...which we now share.

So as we are baptised into new life as sons and daughters of God, the Spirit descends on us to fill us and the Father says, ""You are my son, my daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

And so in contrast to the world, we now live from a place of affirmation and not exhaustingly for affirmation.

## Therefore

So step into today knowing the God the Father loves you and is pleased with you because you are united with Christ, and live from that affirmation, so that you imitate the Son for the glory of the Father

# WEEK 3 / READING 5

## **Text - Hebrews 12:5-11**

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

## **Thought**

Over the past while there has been a fair bit of discussion about parents and discipline on radio talk shows around the issue of a "smacking ban." All of us will have memories of discipline or lack of it as we grew up...for some it was excessive and damaging, but at the same time those whose parents were excessively permissive might also describe it as damaging. A good parent disciplines their children, not in damaging and destructive ways but in loving directing ways...which doesn't mean that discipline was in any way pleasant.

And so as we deepen our understanding of God as our Father and see his goodness and love and generosity and mercy, we will have our perspective changed on our hardships. Rather than turning from God, shouting angrily, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING? You're supposed be a good father!" we can increasingly turn to God, asking humbly, "What are you doing? I want to trust you as my good Father!"

It's not an easy thing to do...certainly not on our own, but we can invite the Holy Spirit to help us to endure the hardships we face with humbly and trust.

**Therefore**

So pray for yourself and other brothers and sisters in Christ, that they might see the love and care of their Father in heaven even in the midst of their hardships.

# WEEK 4

JESUS CHRIST  
HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD  
**GALATIANS 4:4-5**

## REMEMBER

BUT WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME CAME,  
GOD SENT HIS SON, BORN OF A WOMAN, BORN  
UNDER THE LAW, SO THAT HE MIGHT REDEEM  
THOSE WHO WERE UNDER THE LAW, THAT  
WE MIGHT RECEIVE THE ADOPTION AS SONS  
AND DAUGHTERS.

**GALATIANS 4:4-5**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

HEAVEN HAS COME TO US  
SOVEREIGN GRACE MUSIC

## RECITE

Q.What does it mean that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary?

A. That God' s eternal Son,  
who is and remains true and eternal God,  
took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit,  
from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary,  
true human nature so that he might become David's true Son,  
and like his brothers and sisters in every way except for sin.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM  
QUESTION 35**

# WEEK 4 / READING 1

**Text - John 1:1-2, 14 / Matthew 1:22-23**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

## **Thought**

One of the most iconic people of the 80s and 90s was Princess Diana. Known as the people's princess, she was noted for stepping out of the royal world to meet ordinary people and give her time to humanitarian causes. One of her most iconic moments was when she was visiting a hospital ward for patients with HIV captured in a photograph of her shaking the hand of a patient without wearing any gloves. Although she could have spent all of her time with other royals, she chose to spend her time with ordinary people.

For me one of the amazing things about the good news of Jesus is the fact that he came. The one who was with God in the beginning, chose to come to be "God with us". The one who was God chose to become one of us.

Diana's humility and love was what set her apart in people's hearts, yet the good news of Jesus is the story of humility and love that exceeds anything we have ever and will ever see, and so should captivate and thrill the hearts of everyone.

## **Therefore**

So give the Rejoice song a good listen today and simply Rejoice that Jesus, the Son of God, came to be the son of Mary, so that he might make a way for us to become sons and daughters of God.

# WEEK 4 / READING 2

## **Text - Colossians 2:9**

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...

## **Thought**

I was chatting to someone recently who had spent two and a half hours reading through the cross references for the first chapter of Mark and they were just amazed at the depth there was in one chapter of the Bible.

Yet as you read this verse from Colossians, there is a depth that we will never fully fathom....that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"

Jl Packer wrote that "the supreme mystery with which the gospel confronts us...lies not in the Good Friday message of atonement, nor in the Easter message of resurrection, but in the Christmas message of Incarnation. The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man"

Although this is "the supreme mystery," it doesn't mean it isn't worth thinking about. In fact it's essential that we understand that Jesus is totally God and totally man. In fact in the early centuries of the church four major councils were set up to clarify what Christians should believe about who Jesus was, what he was and how he was.

The Council of Chalcedon (451AD) states that Jesus is "the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man,"

## **Therefore**

Over the next two days we'll think about the "why?" Why truly/fully/totally God and man? But for today, it's wonder and worship again at Jesus Christ, in whom "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." He came to us to die so that we could come to him and live.

# WEEK 4 / READING 3

## **Text - Hebrews 2:9,14-18**

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone... Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

## **Thought**

I know I sound like a Heidelberg Catechism fan-boy but it does a brilliant job of explaining "first, the greatness of my sin and misery; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; and third, how I am to thank God for such a deliverance (Q2).

Our sin is great and the misery is the justice we face from God (Q3-10), yet God is merciful and will allow another to pay the debt that we can't (Q11-13). Yet the only person who can pay our debt is "One who is truly human and truly righteous, yet stronger than any creature: that is, one who at the same time is truly God" (Q14-15).

And so Jesus shared in our humanity so he might break the power of the devil and death and free us.

Here's how Question 16 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains it...

Q. Why must the mediator be truly human and truly righteous?

A. He must be truly human because God's justice demands that the human nature which has sinned must pay for its sin. He must

be truly righteous because one who is a sinner can never pay for others.

Later in Hebrews the writer reminds us that the ultimate reason he is able to help those who are tempted is because he is "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Totally man to take our place, totally perfect to pay our debt

### **Therefore**

What's our response to this help from Jesus? If you haven't already, it's first of all acceptance. If you have, then again and again its awe and thanksgiving that he became fully human in order to save us.

# WEEK 4 / READING 4

## **Text - Nahum 1:2-3,6**

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God;  
the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath.  
The Lord takes vengeance on his foes  
and vents his wrath against his enemies.  
The Lord is slow to anger but great in power;  
the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished...  
Who can withstand his indignation?  
Who can endure his fierce anger?  
His wrath is poured out like fire;  
the rocks are shattered before him.

## **Thought**

The book of Nahum is a message of judgement against the city of Nineveh for their evil ways...aren't you glad you don't live in Nineveh?!?! Yet at the same time it is a warning about how God will deal with the sin and evil that marks all our ways...unless we trust in God's mercy that will allow another to pay the debt that we can't (Q11-13).

Yet who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? No mere human can! Which is why Jesus is fully God. He is fully man so he can take our place AND fully God so he can bear our punishment...or as the Heidelberg catechism says, "so that by the strength of his divine nature, he might bear in his human nature the weight of God's anger, and obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life" (Q17).

As we read the Gospel's we are in awe at the strength of his divine nature as he heals the sick, calms the storms and raises the dead...yet his greatest show of strength is to take our sin and therefore God's full wrath upon himself to heal us, give us peace and raise us to life.

## **Therefore**

So it's another day of thanking the Son of God for his strength that saved you from your waywardness and weakness.

# WEEK 4 / READING 5

## Text - Galatians 4:4-5

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

## Thought

So one more chance this week to reflect on this mystery that Jesus was and is God made man. If ever there was a question with no mystery, it's this one from the Heidelberg Catechism...it's the perfect Sunday School answer...who is this mediator? Jesus!

Q. But who is this mediator - truly God, truly human and truly righteous?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is given to us to set us free completely and make us right with God.

The mystery of course is the "truly God, truly human and truly righteous" nature of Jesus...yet it has never been a mystery to God, it has always been his plan...he was waiting for just the right time to send his Son, born of a woman, to redeem his people for adoption. And so the whole bible tells this story, this plan, revealing who Christ is and what he does. One more catechism question for this week... question 19...

Q. Where do you find this out?

A. From the holy gospel, which God himself first revealed in Paradise. Later he proclaimed it through the holy patriarchs and prophets, and portrayed it through the sacrifices and other rites of the law. And finally he fulfilled it through his own dear son.

## Therefore

We can approach reading the Bible as the right thing to do, or as a routine...and these are good things...but they're good things because the Bible is the revelation of God about the supreme mystery about Jesus Christ, who is given to us to set us free completely and make us right with God. So let that shape your reading of the Bible.

# WEEK 5

JESUS CHRIST

HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD

ROMANS 1:1-7

## REMEMBER

NEVER BE  
LACKING IN ZEAL,  
BUT KEEP YOUR SPIRITUAL FERVOUR,  
SERVING THE LORD.

**ROMANS 12:11**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

ALL HAIL THE POWER OF JESUS NAME  
SHANE & SHANE

## RECITE

Q. Why do you call him our Lord?

A. Because not with gold or silver  
but with his precious blood,  
he has set us free from sin  
and from the tyranny of the devil,  
and has bought us, body and soul,  
to be his very own.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM  
QUESTION 34**

# WEEK 5 / READING 1

## **Text - Romans 6:16-18 / John 8:36**

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

## **Thought - Submission is freedom**

Life is full of contradictions. Some we need to embrace...like Socrates realisation that the more you know, the more you realise you know nothing. Some we need to fight back against...like the increasing level of isolation in a world where we are more connected than ever.

Our spiritual lives are marked by two contradictions...

The first is that Satan promises us freedom... "You will not certainly die" he whispered to Eve in the Garden. You're free to do whatever you want...but the promise was a lie and made us all slaves...the reality is we are slaves to sin, this tyrannical oppression Satan, the one who hates us, which leads to death. The second is that submission to Jesus as Lord, to become his slave, to be mastered by him as the one we obey is freedom. The one who frees us from sin and death by his death also buys us with his blood as his very own, and under his Lordship we will be free indeed. Free to experience peace, joy, hope that will extend into eternity.

And so embracing Jesus as Lord, gives us the freedom from and the ability to fight against the sin that leads to death...so that we will be free indeed forever

## **Therefore**

So embrace Jesus as Lord today, and enjoy the freedom he gives us.

# WEEK 5 / READING 2

## Text - Psalm 1:1-6

Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,  
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.  
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.

Not so the wicked!

They are like chaff  
that the wind blows away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

## Thought - Submission is blessing

The whispered promise of Satan that freedom is ours to take still can be heard day after day...and when we look around we can often see that at first glance it seems that promise is true...and so we can be tempted to chase freedom by waking in step with the wicked, standing in the way of sinners or sitting in the company of mockers, as Psalm 1 describes.

But ultimately, whether in this life or the next, this promised freedom will actually prove to be dry, dead and destruction, our lives like chaff that the wind blows away.

But look at the contrast with the one who submits themselves to the Lord. life, fruit, flourishing, prospering...true blessing, true freedom.

And what a way to describe submission to the Lord...to delight yourself in his law, to meditate on it, to think on it and see its beauty

and brilliance and then do it. And what does it say about the nature of this Lord, about his beauty and brilliance?

Blessed is the one who submits themselves to the Lord and his law, for they will find life and freedom, as opposed to the cursed life that comes from being suckered by the whispered false promises of the enemy.

### **Therefore**

Ask the Holy Spirit to renew your vision of the Bible...the law of the Lord who freed you and bought you and promises you life and freedom forever...so that it is your delight day to day.

# WEEK 5 / READING 3

## **Text - Luke 6:46-49**

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

## **Thought - Submission is wisdom**

The wise man built his house upon the rock

The wise man built his house upon the rock

The wise man built his house upon the rock

And the rains came tumbling down.

The rains came down and the floods came up,

The rains came down and the floods came up,

The rains came down and the floods came up,

But the house on the Rock stood firm.

Now that I've got that Sunday School song lodged in your head for the rest of the day...let's think about an idea that we need to lodge in our hearts for the rest of our lives...that submitting to the Lord, that is, coming to him, hearing his words and putting them into practice is the wisest thing we can do. If Jesus is the Lord, the one who has ultimate control and authority, and the one who graciously invites us to come to him so that we can find freedom and live in that freedom, then why would we not put into practice what he says. Submission is wisdom. And we need to be wise

## **Therefore**

So here's the question for all of us. Are there areas of our lives where we're more foolish builder than wise...where we say Lord, Lord, but don't put his words into practice? Come to Jesus for forgiveness and for wisdom.

# WEEK 5 / READING 4

## **Text - Ephesians 2:8-10**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

## **Thought - Submission is gratitude**

Hopefully this week so far we’ve seen some of the beneficial results of submitting to Jesus as Lord, but we can’t miss out on the reason, the motivation, the foundation of our submission.

The base of all of this is not what our submission does for us, but on what the one we submit to has done for us. We have been saved through faith, not by our works, not by any submission on our part, but by Jesus submitting himself to the cross.

And so our good works, are ultimately a response to this grace, this goodness given to us despite us. Our submission to Jesus our Saviour is gratitude, our thankful response to Jesus as Lord.

So we can look to motivate ourselves in submission in thinking of the freedom, the blessing and the wisdom it is, but we also must be motivated by the Gospel, the good news of Jesus’ death in our place, his love, his grace, his mercy towards us.

## **Therefore**

So if you’re struggling to submit to Jesus as Lord, take time at the start of each day to bring to mind the Gospel you believed in. One writer says, “God did not give us His gospel just so we could embrace it and be converted. He offers it to us every day as a gift that keeps on giving to us everything we need for life and godliness.” So ponder the Gospel you have believed every morning as you wake up and let it give to you the gratitude that makes you grow in submission day by day.

# WEEK 5 / READING 5

## **Text - Romans 10:9-13**

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

## **Thought - Submission is subversion**

Imagine living in first century Rome amid the might of the Caesars or 1930's Germany amid the power of the Fuhrer or 21st century North Korea amid the control of the Supreme Leader...and declaring with your mouth that "Jesus is Lord".

As Michael Bird writes, "Confession of Jesus as Lord was always a scandalous and subversive claim." Those three words hollow out the claims of ultimate authority of any leader, movement, worldview, philosophy and state the truth that Jesus is THE LORD...and as we confess them, we say he is also MY LORD. To quote Michael Bird again, to declare it means "standing up to the Caesars of the world who usurped for themselves the praise and the power that rightly belonged to God. As Christians today, our highest vocation is to live our lives under the canopy of Jesus's lordship and to make it clear to all that "this Jesus" whom men and women reject, is Lord of all. What is more, the Lord Jesus will bring justice to our sin-cursed earth and then flood the world with the *shalom* of heaven."

Your life challenges the world around you, the Caesars, the rulers, the powerful, the influencers so that they might see Jesus as the Lord and might come to know him through his grace and love as their Lord too

## **Therefore**

Following on from yesterday, as well as pondering the Gospel to start your day and motivate your submission, maybe take time to simply declare these three words to start your day, "Jesus is Lord!"

# WEEK 6

SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE,  
WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED & WAS BURIED  
**1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-32**

## REMEMBER

FOR THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS  
IS FOOLISHNESS  
TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING,  
BUT TO US WHO ARE BEING SAVED  
IT IS THE POWER OF GOD.  
**1 CORINTHIANS 1:18**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

**ALL MY BOAST**

MATT BOSWELL, MATT PAPA, BRYAN FOWLER

## RECITE

Q. What do you understand when you say that Christ suffered?

A. That during all his life on earth, but especially at the end,  
Christ bore in body and soul the wrath of God  
against the sin of the whole human race.

This he did, so that by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice  
he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation,  
and gain for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM  
QUESTION 337**

# WEEK 6 / READING 1

## **Text - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

## **Thought - Foolishness**

On April Fool's day, we might spend our time trying to avoid the pranks and tricks...maybe you've been caught out by a classic prank...like the 1957 BBC Panorama report on the Swiss Spaghetti Harvest (including images of people harvesting spaghetti from trees. Some people actually contacted the programme to ask how they could grow a spaghetti tree...the fools!

I imagine that if there had been Panorama in the days of Jesus...and there had been April Fool's Day...people watching the story of the anointed Messiah of Israel (that's what Christ means) being executed on a cross might have thought that this is a pretty gruesome April Fool's joke...a messiah who get's murdered. Looks like he's the fool !'m not getting caught out by this.

Yet rather than avoiding being a fool, Paul, the writer of 1 Corinthians, an educated and influential and wise man in his own right has embraced being a fool, because his life is centred on Christ crucified.

Because he has seen and believed that this is actually the wisdom and power of God...“that by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, and gain for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.”

Christ crucified is no prank, it is the promise of sins forgiven and a forever future in the family of God. That’s worth being a fool for.

### **Therefore**

So embrace being a fool today, not by doing anything dumb, but by believing in, living for and speaking of Christ crucified.

# WEEK 6 / READING 2

## **Text - Philippians 3:10-14**

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

## **Thought - Suffered**

There's a great scene near the start of the movie *Gladiator* as Maximus (Russell Crowe) rouses the troops before battle...

"Three weeks from now I will be harvesting my crops. Imagine where you will be, and it will be so. Hold the line! Stay with me!" I imagine I would not have been in Maximus' elite regiment, but if I was there I'd be, "I'm with you..."

He continues...If you find yourself alone, riding in green fields with the sun on your face, do not be troubled, for you are in Elysium, and you're already dead!!! I imagine at that point I'd be, hang on a minute, can I reconsider?

And so I imagine the readers of *Philippians* are thinking...I want to know Christ...yep, sign me up...yes, to know the power of his resurrection...resurrection power, yes please...and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...sorry, did you just say suffering and death.

But the reality is that our lives as Christians in this world are like those of the soldiers beside Maximus in *Gladiator*. When we come to Christ in faith, we step into a war and now face the violent resistance Christ did. Revelation 12 describes Satan in image of a dragon, saying,

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring - those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

Maximus was right at the conclusion of his speech...

What we do in life echos in eternity

Keeping God's commands on the path of obedience and holding fast our testimony as we live out our call to go with the good news of Jesus bear witness to the world of the message of the cross, the power of God to save those who believe. And so the dragon wars against us and we suffer.

But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God (1 Peter 2:19) and if you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Peter 4:14)

### **Therefore**

So in whatever suffering you face for following Jesus, know that you have the privilege of participating in his sufferings, and so fix your eyes on him, the pioneer and perfecter of faith and press on. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. One day your suffering will be complete, and your joy will be full at the right hand of God the Father.

# WEEK 6 / READING 3

## **Text - Galatians 2:20-21**

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

## **Thought - Crucified**

Have you seen the magic trick where the magician puts their beautiful/handsome (equal opportunities magic here) assistant in a box...head, arms and legs sticking out, and then they stick massive swords seemingly through them. They want you to believe they've been skewered yet at the same time they're fine. Of course its just magic...an illusion...a trick.

Yet as Paul writes to the Galatians about the reality of following Jesus, he describes it almost like the magic trick, there's no box, but there is a cross, there's no sword, but there are nails...at least in the picture he's painting...and he has been nailed to it...but at the same time...

Here's how the King James Version of the Bible puts it...

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live..."

But it's not magic, it's because of the Messiah...

"...yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

It's like our old selves, so corrupted and controlled by sin, have been crucified...because in Christ they're dead and gone, they no longer control us. One writer describes it like this....

"A Christian is a person who has died with Christ, whose stiff neck has been broken, whose brazen forehead has been shattered, whose stony heart has been crushed, whose pride has been slain, and whose life is now mastered by Jesus Christ."

And so we live...how? Well it's not us, It's Christ who lives in us. We have been forgiven, and at the same time we have been filled with the Spirit of Christ...and so to live, we live by faith in the Christ who gave himself for us in our forgiveness and who gives himself to us in our filling.

### **Therefore**

So the question is, do you live out this crucifixion of self day by day, or are you cruising along in your own steam, at your own speed, on your own schedule...are you filled with the Spirit of Christ or filling your life again with the things you've been rescued from. Jesus invites us to take up our cross daily, to daily find forgiveness and daily be filled by his Spirit...maybe today is about taking up that invitation again.

# WEEK 6 / READING 4

## **Text - John 11:25-26**

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

## **Thought - Died**

Jesus' promise as he consoles Martha at the death of her brother is so awesome because of the awesome power of death over us. Here's a bit of a spoken word piece by David Bowden that describes that power

And I saw him Death, with his mighty sting,  
Exhaling in every breath the plight he brings.  
To the grave he gave victory  
Triumphing over life with the fear of endless sleep.  
Endlessly we hide from our mortality.  
Mortally wounded from birth  
We lie to ourselves from infancy  
Infinitely investing time in a life  
that will Inevitably be taken by this  
Incredible creature that stands before me: Death  
He manifests himself on ordinary days  
His 6 foot stomach  
growls with hunger pangs.  
For his meal, he cannot wait.  
So we are forced to taste him  
even before the grave  
We are all dying, there's no other way

Yet Jesus promises that if we believe in him, we will live even though we die. So Jesus in dying in the flesh does something to death itself...David Bowden describes it as "championing over death with the beauty of his fatal injury"

And so the grave becomes something other than death's victory over our physical life...it becomes as the Heidelberg Catechism says "an end to our sinning, and our entrance into eternal life."

And so to quote David Bowden again...

Oh Death, where is your sting?  
Oh Grave, where is your victory?  
For we have risen above your misery!  
We will not succumb to your finality!  
We have overcome your infamous mystery!  
In the infinite reign of Christ's ministry!

### **Therefore**

The question is..."Do you believe this?"

And the answer, well, the answer must be Martha's..."Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'

# WEEK 6 / READING 5

## **Text - 1 Corinthians 1:19-32**

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

## **Thought - Buried**

There was a feature this morning on the radio about the Royal Horticultural Society doing some work to connect more children to gardening...and today I want to connect us to the idea of gardening.

That’s not a novel approach...Jesus does it in the parable of the sower, Paul does it when he talks about resurrection bodies...“The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable” (1 Corinthians 15:43)...my favourite spoken word poet and evangelist Glen Scrivener, riffing off Paul’s thoughts in his poem on resurrection says “death is a gardener, we are the seed.”

Now my turn. On Sunday we spoke about the idea that Paul in these verse from today is burying any idea that our salvation has anything to do with our impressiveness...because in the grand scheme of things we are foolish, weak, lowly and despised. But maybe we need to think of it more as planted than buried. Burying our pride, our independence, our reliance on our performance and our good deeds, is really planting the seed of faith that rests in, relies on and rejoices in the grace of God and the foolishness of the cross...and from that seed springs a life that boasts only in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

## **Therefore**

So what area of pride, independence, reliance on your performance and your good deeds do you need to bury...sorry plant...today so that the flowers and fruit of boasting in Jesus and his cross alone might spring up?

# WEEK 7

SUFFERED...WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED & WAS  
BURIED; HE DESCENDED TO THE DEAD  
**COLOSSIANS 2:13-15**

## REMEMBER

AND HAVING DISARMED  
THE POWERS AND AUTHORITIES,  
HE MADE A PUBLIC SPECTACLE OF THEM,  
TRIUMPHING OVER THEM  
BY THE CROSS.

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:18**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

**OVERCOME**  
DESPERATION BAND

## RECITE

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I, with body and soul, in life and in death, am not my own,  
but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.  
He with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins,  
and set me free from all the power of the devil;  
and so preserves me so that without the will of my heavenly Father  
not a hair can fall from my head;  
indeed, all things must work together for my salvation.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM**  
**QUESTION 1**

# WEEK 7 / READING 1

## **Text - Revelation 12:9-12,17**

The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God,  
and the authority of his Messiah.

For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,  
who accuses them before our God day and night,  
has been hurled down.

They triumphed over him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
as to shrink from death.

Therefore rejoice, you heavens  
and you who dwell in them!

But woe to the earth and the sea,  
because the devil has gone down to you!

He is filled with fury,  
because he knows that his time is short

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

## **Thought - We will overcome**

The Bible is brutally honest about the reality we live in...war. We see the physical reality of war daily on our TV screens or in our history books but there is a spiritual reality behind the day to day life of the world that reminds us that there are not just areas of conflict in this world, but this world is an arena of conflict. Satan, “the great dragon,” as Revelation describes him has been cast down, and is leading the

world astray into evil and, filled with fury, waging war against those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

Yet the Bible is brilliantly hopeful about the outcome. Satan's time is short and we will overcome.

Even he knows his time is short, but he's furiously making the most of his opportunities to cause destruction before he is destroyed at the end of time. He will be overcome by Jesus Christ, our Messiah, who has defeated him on the cross already and one day will throw him into the lake of fire forever.

And we will share in that victory...and at the same time day to day we can live in that victory...the blood of the Lamb covers us, the word of our testimony, the message of the cross, the triumph of the cross is a powerful weapon in the face of his furious condemnation, temptation, persecution and confusion.

### **Therefore**

So today, remember you're going to war. Remember Satan's time is short. Remember the blood of the Lamb. Remember the word of your testimony. Rejoice in Jesus triumph. We will overcome.

# WEEK 7 / READING 2

## **Text - Romans 8:1-4,33-34**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

## **Thought - Condemnation**

If you have brothers or sisters, you're likely to have experienced the trick where they encourage you to do something wrong and then they rat you out to your parents and you're in trouble.

It's an age old trick. We read of Satan tempting Eve and Adam to eat the forbidden fruit in Genesis, but unwritten is the accuser (we read that name for him yesterday) doing what accusers do...making accusations, to God...they're in trouble. Not that God needed Satan to keep him in the loop, he sees all things after all, but Satan's accusations display his hatred for God's creation, especially those created in his likeness.

And so we all find ourselves in the likeness of Adam and Eve, being tricked and touted on...yet the good news of the Bible is found in the first verse we read today.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...

Why? Because Jesus takes our sin on the cross, gives us forgiveness forever and so the accusations of Satan are nullified before God. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? Nobody!

But Satan doesn't just land his accusations before God, he lobbs them at us as well, reminding us of what we've done, what we're like, how we've acted...and his aim is to drown us, overwhelm us with condemnation and so nullify our lives as followers of Jesus.

Yet the truth he tells us about what we've done is not as powerful as the truth we've believed about what Christ has done for us. Martin Luther put it this way...

"When the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: 'I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!'"

### **Therefore**

Here's another line that sums up the truth of the Gospel we get to live in. It's from Pilgrim's Progress, and is Pilgrim's response to accusation and condemnation about his sin...

"All this is true; and much more which thou hast left out: but the Prince whom I serve and honour is merciful and ready to forgive.

Ironically what Satan, the Father of lies, reminds you of is true...you've sinned...but Gospel truth is "truer" (if that's the way to put it)...you're saved. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...Believe it.

# WEEK 7 / READING 3

## **Text - Galatians 5:13-18**

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

## **Thought - Temptation**

I'm not sure how they know I need this...but I think Google and Facebook and their algorithms are aware that the shorts Heather bought me for my birthday don't fit round the waist...because I keep on seeing ads for summer shape up challenges for Belfast Men to shake off the winter slump, and make positive changes to my body composition and be leaner, fitter and stronger. But it's not just, "Get to the gym and do it yourself," it's having a personal trainer who will help you walk the walk of shaping up for the summer...who will help motivate and equip you to avoid the things that "un-shape" you.

Satan's furious desire is to "un-shape" us...to make us unfit Christians who don't live lives worthy of the calling we've received in the Gospel, so he has this strategy of furious temptation.

The answer to this is not just do it yourself, we have been blessed with the Holy Spirit, who is more than just a mentor and coach, although those are helpful ways to understand aspects of his work in our lives. The Holy Spirit is God living within us, so we can walk in his power, under his instruction, and when we do we will not gratify the desires of the flesh...in other words, give into Satan's furious temptations.

**Therefore**

So in the face of temptation today, remember the presence of the Holy Spirit within you, request his help and resolve yourself to walk in step with him in his power.

# WEEK 7 / READING 4

## **Text - Revelation 2:9-11**

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

## **Thought - Persecution**

There's been a bit in the sports news recently about athletes qualifying for the Olympics and the chance to win an Olympic medal. But back in the day, at the first Olympic games, winners would get a victor's crown...made of olive leaves (and the right to have a statue of themselves set up in Olympia).

So we have this instruction to be faithful illustrated by a race and the perseverance to keep going...but it won't like any other race, not even the steeplechase where people fall in the water. This was more like a gauntlet, because their reality was affliction and slander and testing and persecution from Satan...that might even take them to the point of death.

But the triumph of the cross reminds us that Jesus has run that gauntlet already to the point of death, and now alive he wears the ultimate victors crown. It is him waiting at the finished line urging us on with the promise of life.

Most of us won't have to be faithful to the point of death caused by persecution, but we are called to be faithful until the day we die, no

matter what Satan in his furious persecution throws at us. Because Jesus was faithful onto death, and he will be faithful to give us life.

**Therefore**

Today, take time to pray for those who are facing persecution. Ask the Holy Spirit to help them have a vision of Jesus and his faithfulness, and his promise of the victor's crown...so that they will be faithful even to the point of death

# WEEK 7 / READING 5

## **Text - John 16:7-15**

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

## **Thought - Confusion**

There were many nights at football training, when I was coaching, that you wondered just how to get peoples attention and draw them into an effective training session. They were all over the place, distracted and distracting, confusion seemed to reign.

And so sometimes as individuals and as a church we might look out and see a community and a world where we're struggling to get peoples attention...where it seems that the message of the Gospel doesn't land, doesn't matter, doesn't work for people...confusion seems to reign.

And that's because Satan's strategy it to lead the world astray from truth into lies, from light into dark, from life into death...and he's a master of it, a master of confusion.

Yet we are not on our own, helpless in the face of confusion, like me at the football session. Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit into the world to bring conviction where confusion reigns...conviction about sin and a need of rescue from the judgement of God.

So in the face of confusion, and people being led astray, the first place we go is not to our strategies and ideas, but to prayer, to ask for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and then lead us into the truth we need to share with those who are open to hear it...and believe it... and trust in it.

### **Therefore**

So, take a dander today up and down your street or around your community and pray...asking the Holy Spirit to bring conviction where there is confusion so that people might in Jesus find themselves free from condemnation.

# WEEK 8

ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN  
**1 PETER 1:3-5**

## REMEMBER

PRAISE BE TO THE GOD  
AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!  
IN HIS GREAT MERCY HE HAS GIVEN US  
NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH  
THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST  
FROM THE DEAD  
**1 PETER 3:5**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week  
**DEATH WAS ARRESTED**  
NORTH POINT WORSHIP

## RECITE

Q. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?

A. First, by his resurrection he has overcome death,  
so that he might make us sharers in the righteousness  
which he won for us when he died.

Second, by his might we too are already raised up to a new life.  
And third, in his resurrection we have a sure pledge  
of our own glorious resurrection.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM**  
**QUESTION 45**

# WEEK 8 / READING 1

## **Text - 1 Corinthians 15:1-8**

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

## **Thought**

I love a good courtroom drama as the lawyers try and weave (or unweave if your the defence) the threads of a story into a compelling case. There is all the circumstantial evidence and the physical evidence and then there is the power of the witness, someone who seen it happen.

The story Paul tells constantly is the Gospel story, because it's "by this gosel you are saved." So for him it's of first importance, not juts to preach it once but to constantly remind people of it...

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

He was buried.

He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

For anyone, the last bit is the potential unbelievable bit of the story... really? He rose form the dead? And so it's here Paul wheels out the witnesses...

He appeared to Cephas.

Then he appeared to the Twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters.

Did I mention that was at the same time.

The resurrection has circumstantial and physical evidence but the real power is in the witnesses...many who seen Jesus in the flesh.

It really is true that on the third day he rose again.

It really is something about which we can say, "I believe..."

### **Therefore**

As we work our way through 1 Corinthians 15 this week, ask the Holy Spirit to build your belief in the reality and the results of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

# WEEK 8 / READING 2

## **Text - 1 Corinthians 15:12-20**

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

## **Thought**

Have you even played the "If..." game. I'm not sure it's an official game, but you know the thing where you think "If [this]...then [that]."

"If I had limitless air miles, I'd fly to New Zealand"

"If I had a personal chef, I'd be having steak and chips for tea tonight"

"If I had been spotted by a football scout while practising keep ups in my garden when I was 11, I might have won the Premier League by now"

The last one is autobiographical...and I still believe it every time I kick a football...only joking...kinda!

Anyway, Paul plays the "If..." game and at the heart of it is this...

"If Christ has not been raised...then [that]"

What's the [that]? Well then your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...and people should laugh at you and pity you because you put your hope in a guy that got executed on a cross. Full stop.

I know this sounds weird when you say it out loud...don't miss the massive "but" in this section.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.

He's laid out the witness proof of the resurrection already...and so now in the resurrection we have undeniable proof that our faith isn't futile, we're rescued from and forgiven of our sin.

### **Therefore**

So today when your sin gets hold of you and tries to convince you it's still in control, that you're still in it, remind yourself of what Paul writes...But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. Proof that you are rescued from and forgiven of every sin.

# WEEK 8/ READING 3

## **Text - 1 Corinthians 15:20-26**

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

## **Thought**

Sometimes there are little lines that jump out of the Bible at you which are juts bursting with promise and hope. And in this passage, there is such a line, at least for me anyway...

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Paul nails our problem. We are "in Adam." The Heidelberg Catechism describes in like this...

"This fall [Adam and Eve's first disobedience] has so poisoned our nature that we are all born sinners: corrupt from conception on.

...and so death is our curse.

But then along comes Jesus Christ who reverses the Fall and the curse.

So in Christ - that is believing in and trusting in Jesus as the one who died and rose again to save us

All - there's no exclusions, no fine print, no red lines...all who believe

Will - there is no doubt, no if, buts and maybes, "will" is soaked in certainty

Be made - this isn't something we do ourselves, it's done to us. It's a gift to receive rather than a task to achieve

Alive - this isn't just reanimation, like Lazarus, new breath in a corrupt body that will die again. This is resurrection to real true and free life. We will one day be truly alive, despite our sin, even though we die.

Of course there's the timing of all that, and we'll trust Jesus to work it out. He's the one who has defeated death in the grave, and one day will destroy it forever.

### **Therefore**

In Speak Life's 321 evangelistic tool, pose the question...

You are one with Adam. Will you be one with Jesus?

What's your answer? Death or life? And if it's life, then remember that "in Christ all will be made alive."

# WEEK 8 / READING 4

## **Text - 1 Corinthians 15:35-44**

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

## **Thought**

I'm not sure that the apostle Paul would ever be called as an expert on Gardeners corner alongside Monty Don, Carol Klein and Alan Titchmarsh...but he does use a powerful image from the gardening/farming world here as he deals with people asking foolish questions as they try and undermine or make fun of the idea of a bodily resurrection for God's people.

Paul simply says "Wise up (I'm not sure what the exact Greek for that is) look at a seed!" When you look at a seed on t'sown, it is unimpressive, devoid of life seemingly, but plant it in the ground and what God wills springs to life out of it, whether it's one of Jeff's massive sunflowers or an oak tree.

Paul says, don't doubt it, look what God does with a seed, imagine what he can do with your body...The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

I remember standing in Carnmoney cemetery before a committal recently and someone saying, imagine the life that will spring forth from a place like this when Jesus returns.

Like those of us who got a sunflower seed on Sunday will wait patiently until life springs forth from beneath the soil, so we, as Christians, wait patiently for Jesus to return and the soil to burst forth with resurrection life

### **Therefore**

So wherever you see flowers and plants and trees today, remember the tiny little, essentially dead seed that beauty came from and thank God that through Jesus that same flowering will be yours one day.

# WEEK 8 / READING 5

## Text - 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

## Thought - Confusion

As Paul’s long section on resurrection comes to a close, it closes out with a crescendo...this song of triumph over death to be sung at the final resurrection.

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

If you’re looking for a good version of that to sing, check out Matt Maher’s *Christ Is Risen From the Dead*

Oh death! Where is your sting?

Oh hell! Where is your victory?

Oh Church! Come stand in the light!

The glory of God has defeated the night!

Oh death! Where is your sting?

Oh hell! Where is your victory?

Oh Church! Come stand in the light!  
Our God is not dead, he's alive! he's alive!

One of the things I love about Matt's song is the invitation not just to sing this song in advance of our own resurrection, but to live in it in this life and not just in the next.

Oh Church! Come stand in the light!

What does it mean to stand in the light? Well, Paul tells us...

Stand firm. Let nothing move you - because even death can't ruin us or rip us away from the love of our victorious Lord

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord - and if this is the case we can throw ourselves all in to the work of the Lord, because his is the victory.

### **Therefore**

So, church, no matter how dark death seems, come stand in the light of the victory of Christ the one who, to quote another song (Death In His Grave by John Mark McMillan)

"Awoke with the keys  
To Hell on that day"

and

"laid death in his grave"

Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord

# WEEK 9

HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, HE IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER, AND HE WILL COME TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

**LUKE 24:50-53 / ACTS 1:1-11**

## REMEMBER

THIS SAME JESUS,  
WHO HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM YOU  
INTO HEAVEN,  
WILL COME BACK IN THE SAME WAY  
YOU HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN.

**ACTS 1:11**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD ABOVE  
SHANE & SHANE

## RECITE

Q. What do you mean by saying  
he ascended into heaven?

A. That Christ, in the sight of his disciples,  
was lifted up from earth to heaven  
and is there for our good  
until he comes again  
to judge the living and the dead.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM  
QUESTION 46**

# WEEK 9 / READING 1

## **Text - Luke 24:50-53**

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

## **Thought**

If you looked at the physical facts of the end of Luke...Jesus was with the disciples and then Jesus wasn't with the disciples, you could simply take those three words..."He left them"...as the way the story ends.

Of course we know that is not how the story ends because Luke retells the story in his sequel Acts and has angels telling the disciples that "this same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

And we know as we study the rest of the Bible (which we'll do in the rest of the devotions this week) that Jesus, as the catechism tells us, "was lifted up from earth to heaven and is there for our good until he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

As the week progresses we'll think about Jesus as the permanent priest, the king of kings and the sender of the Spirit, but for today we just want to note the disciples immediate response to the ascended Jesus..."they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

The ascended Jesus, who died for us, was raised to life for us, and now is in heaven for our good is deserving of our worship, and even in a world of fear and anxiety and uncertainty...who know what the disciples faced and fretted about in Jerusalem and the future...we can still have a defiant great joy.

## **Therefore**

So today, as you go about your day, pepper it with moments of worship of the ascended Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with great joy despite what you might face.

# WEEK 9 / READING 2

## Text - Hebrews 6:19-20

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

## Thought

If you've had any connections with the Boys Brigade...we'll even count those companies that a rep't the 33rd!!!...you'll be aware of the significance of the anchor as a symbol and then the BB hymn, Will your anchor hold. It asks the question of whether your anchor (whatever it may be for you) hold in the storms of life and the straits of fear. And then it proclaims an anchor, sure and steadfast, fastened to the Rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love...I bet you you're singing it now!!!

The last verse speaks of the great curse, death, the consequences of our sin and rebellion...and an anchor that hold within the veil even in the floods of death...

Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,  
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?  
On the rising tide you can never fail,  
while your anchor holds within the veil.

What on earth are they taking about. Well, they're talking about hope in the ascended Jesus who we see in our passage for today. Now ascended he has become a high priest forever and entered into God's presence our behalf...for us!!!!...,which means he has taken the ultimate sacrifice for sins...himself...into God's presence, so that now God is satisfied in his death, and we can be forgiven and restored and welcomed as God's children.

There is an anchor that secures us even in the floods of death, because, now our sure and steadfast hope is that, as the Heidelberg catechism says in question 42...

Our death is not a payment for our sins: it is rather an end to our sinning, and our entrance into eternal life.

And this is grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.

**Therefore**

So in your ongoing struggle with sin, and your battle against the enemies accusations, know that the ascended Jesus, as our forever high priest has dealt with our sins once and for all. Receive his forgiveness, believe in his love, and live life anchored by that hope.

# WEEK 9/ READING 3

## **Text - Ephesians 1:18-23**

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

## **Thought**

When you look at the ascension of Jesus, you need to think about what it means (what is actually happening) and what it means to us (what should happen in our lives).

I can't do any better than Michael Bird in "What Christians Ought to Believe, so I'm going to quote him (as he quotes an old guy called Polycarp)

"...Jesus had been taken into heaven in order to take control of the affairs of the universe. The person whom Christians worship and bear witness to is the one whom the God of Israel marked out as the Lord of the universe. As for what Jesus exaltation means for discipleship, hear the words of the martyr Polycarp in his letter to the Philippians:

"Therefore, prepare for action and serve God in fear and truth, leaving behind the empty and meaningless talk and the error for the crowd, and believing in the one who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory and a throne at his right hand. To him all things in heaven and on earth were subjected, whom every breathing creature serves, who is coming as judge of the living and the dead."

To use a meteorological pun, to be a follower of Jesus means to walk in the “reign” of Jesus. It entails that believers order their lives, finances, relationships, ambitions, and hopes around the most important confession of the faith: Jesus is Lord.”

### **Therefore**

So what does it look like for you to walk in the “reign” of Jesus today? What areas of your life need to be ordered around your confession of Jesus as Lord?

# WEEK 10

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT  
**ACTS 1:1-9 / 2:1-47**

## REMEMBER

BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES ON YOU; AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.”

**ACTS 1:8**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week

**THE SENDING**  
LELAND

## RECITE

Q. What do you believe concerning the Holy Spirit?

A. First, that he, with the Father and the Son  
is true and eternal God.

Second, that he is given to me,  
to make me share, by true faith,  
in Christ and all his blessings, to comfort me,  
and to remain with me forever.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM**  
**QUESTION 43**

# WEEK 10 / READING 1

## **Text - John 3:1-8**

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

## **Thought**

If there was a cartoon of Nicodemus talking to Jesus, you'd have that cutaway of his head and the cogs working overtime in where his brain should be...or if you're more used to memes, he'd be the one with the confused guy and all the formulas floating in front of him.

It's the Spirit, Jesus tells Nicodemus, and us, who brings new life through new birth to people dead in their sins. There is mystery here in exactly how the Spirit works...but that doesn't mean there isn't truth...truth found across the Bible

Jesus told his disciples (John 16:8-10) that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment...conviction

doesn't mean declaring us to be guilty, but helping us see that we are guilty of sin and deserving of the consequences.

In Ezekiel (36:26) the Spirit's work is described as a heart transplant, a heart of stone removed and replaced by a heart of flesh...taking out something dead and replacing it with something living.

And this new birth, or new conviction or new heart leads us to faith in the one who was crucified, died and was buried, who was raised to life on the third day and is now ascended in heaven.

Think of a lady called Lydia in Acts 16. The Lord (that is the Holy Spirit) opened her heart and she believed.

Right at the start of any story of faith is the work of the Spirit.

### **Therefore**

So give thanks for the mysterious and might work of the Holy Spirit at the start of your life of faith, and then pray for more of his mystery and might in the lives of the people around you.

# WEEK 10 / READING 2

## **Text - Acts 2:1-4, 36-39**

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

...

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

## **Thought**

I'm guessing that most of us look at the story of Pentecost in wonder. We wonder at the experience and how awesome it must have been with the rushing wind sound and the tongues of fire and the speaking in different languages...which is fair enough, it must have been wonderful to be there.

But we also might wonder if this was only limited to the disciples, the super Christians. Well in one sense it was a unique moment in the life of the church, the launch of the church so to speak...but at the same time we see this promise is "for all whom the Lord our God will call" - the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit is for all who believe.

So whilst you might not have experienced the sound of a rushing wind and flames of fire above your head, when you came to faith, you experienced your own mini Pentecost where the Holy Spirit, God

himself, came to dwell within you. And like the first disciples in that room you are sent out to be Christ's witnesses.

### **Therefore**

We'll think over the rest of the week about what the Holy Spirit does in our lives, and how even though we have the Spirit dwelling in us, we need to keep being filled with the Spirit. But for now, give thanks to God for calling you, to Jesus for winning your forgiveness and to the Holy Spirit for taking up residence within you so you can be all that God calls you to be.

# WEEK 10 / READING 3

## **Text - Ephesians 1:17-19 / 3:18-19**

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

I pray that out of his 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 I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to 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.

## **Thought**

Over the past month or so it has been exam season in our house, final GCSEs, GCSE modules, school summer exams...and as our guys have looked to revise and fully understand all that they're supposed to, they used some resources outside of themselves...revision guides written by teachers, BBC Bytesize, YouTube videos, friends who are teachers...and they've given wisdom, explanation, understating, the ability to grasp concepts that were beyond them on their own.

As we think about the Holy Spirit today, looking at two separate prayers of Paul for the church, we see his (the Holy Spirit that is, not Paul) work is to give us help from outside ourselves so that we can understand and grasp things that we couldn't on our own.

Jesus talks about the holy Spirit leading us into all truth...which means he'll help us understand the Bible, God's words for us...but also to begin to grasp in greater ways what is true, the wide and long and high and deep love of Christ for us...to help us know this love that surpasses knowledge.

Sometimes it took a little persuasion for our guys to accept some help, but when they did, they benefitted greatly. In the same way, we might need to allow ourselves to be persuaded to go and ask the Holy Spirit to open our minds and our hearts to know and grasp God's truth and Christ's true love.

### **Therefore**

Michael Bird in his book, "What Christians Ought to Believe," suggests that "we should expect the Holy Spirit's work to be something we experience since spiritual experience is part of the promise of the Gospel." So ask the Holy Spirit to help you to understand and grasp truth and love, and expect to experience his help.

# WEEK 10 / READING 4

## Text - Acts 1:4-8

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit." Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

## Thought

Are you a "big light" person or not? In our house, it's frowned on to put the big light on lol! Instead we have multiple little lamps and fairy lights which make the room look nice, but really aren't helpful for my ageing eyes to read anything.

Anyway, in our hall is a little set of fairy lights, which aren't doing their job because they have no batteries in them. To work, to do their job, to fulfil their aesthetic mission to glam up our hall, they need batteries, power.

Now we don't want to simply describe the Holy Spirit as our spiritual battery, he is not simply a force...although he does give us power... but that power also comes through our giftedness...what gifts and abilities we are given by him...and it comes through our person...as he works within us to shape us into the likeness of Christ, by growing the fruit of the Spirit within us.

Without the work of the Spirit empowering, and equipping and shaping us, we have zero power to fulfil the call of God on our lives... to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9) as we live in and love the world around us.

## **Therefore**

Someone once described the work of the Holy Spirit as a “spotlight ministry” because his job is to spotlight Jesus and the good news of the Gospel. So maybe you should see yourself as one of many lights that the Holy Spirit is enabling, equipping and empowering to shine their light on Jesus so that the people around us might see Jesus and encounter the Holy Spirit.

# WEEK 10 / READING 5

## **Text - Galatians 5:16, 22-25 / Ephesians 5:18-20**

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Thought**

We've talked a good bit about the roles of the Holy Spirit this week, bringing us to new life, dwelling within us, empowering us, gifting us and shaping us...but it's not that we're utterly passive in this...we have responsibility as well in the process of being the people God has called us to be.

Walk by the Spirit...

Live by the Spirit...

Keep in step with the Spirit...

Be filled with the Spirit...

There's a sense here of following a commanding officer, taking their lead, obeying their command...but as well as the sense of obedience, there is the sense of influence...being under the influence of the spirit in the same way someone might be "under the influence" if they've drunk too much wine...but in a productive and not a destructive way, in a Christ honouring and not Christ demeaning way...

To be under the influence of the Spirit will help us follow the way of the Spirit.

### **Therefore**

So, our responsibility is to be filled by the Spirit and to be following the way of the Spirit. So ask for a filling and resolve yourself for following his guidance into the fullness of life and the fruitfulness of life-giving character promised to you.

# WEEK 11

I BELIEVE IN...THE HOLY CATHOLIC  
CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS  
**1 PETER 2:9-10**

## REMEMBER

BUT YOU ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A ROYAL  
PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, GOD'S  
SPECIAL POSSESSION, THAT YOU MAY  
DECLARE THE PRAISES OF HIM WHO  
CALLED YOU OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS  
WONDERFUL LIGHT  
**1 PETER 2:9**

## REJOICE

Here's our song for the week  
**HOUSE OF THE LORD**  
PHIL WICKHAM

## RECITE

Q. What do you believe,  
concerning the holy catholic Church?

A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word,  
out of the whole human race,  
from the beginning of the world to its end,  
gathers, protects, and preserves for himself  
a fellowship chosen for eternal life and united in true faith.  
And I believe that of this Church I am and always will remain a living  
member.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM**  
**QUESTION 54**

# WEEK 11 / READING 1

## Text - 1 Timothy 3:14-16

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

He appeared in the flesh,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,  
was believed on in the world,  
was taken up in glory.

## Thought

Look at the Royal Family and you see privilege beyond your wildest dreams...palaces and dinner parties and designer clothes...but you can't separate their privilege from their responsibility, the duties they are obliged to perform. With privilege comes responsibility.

In these verses written by the great missionary Paul to a young church leader called Timothy, we see the privilege and responsibility of being part of the people of God, the church.

The privilege is being part of the household of God, welcomed in as prodigals and strangers and enemies to become beloved sons and daughters...how?...why? Because of Jesus who...

appeared in the flesh,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,  
was believed on in the world,  
was taken up in glory.

And now our responsibility is to conduct ourselves as the household of God...reflecting the living God, the pillar and foundation of the

truth, to a world consumed and oppressed by lies....lies that steal and kill and destroy life.

**Therefore**

We'll think further about privilege and responsibility this week but for now, thank God the Father for the privilege of becoming part of his household through Jesus the Son, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you conduct yourself how you ought to as the household of God.

# WEEK 11 / READING 2

## **Text - Romans 12:3-8**

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

## **Thought**

When it comes to DIY I have a tendency to go one of two ways. With flat pack furniture, despite the little drawings that tell you that you need more than one person, I can sometimes plough on by myself until I get stuck because I need other people. With other projects that actually involve sawing wood and drilling walls, I disappear, thinking I have nothing to offer...even though I do...I might not be a pro at drilling but I can hold the ladder.

When it comes to church we need to avoid both extremes...thinking too highly of ourselves, that we don't need anyone else...or thinking we have no use as well.

The church is a body, so we belong to the others...we need the others and the others need us...hands need eyes and eyes need hands etc.

And so in whatever way we have been gifted "according to the grace given to each of us" (which means none of our abilities and talents and gifts are random, but purposefully given by God through his Spirit) we're called to use our gifts...sacrificially, faithfully, diligently, generously, cheerfully.

## **Therefore**

So don't get so carried away with yourself, you think you don't need anyone else, and don't be discouraged by thinking you're just a spare part. You're part of the body of Christ...in terms of the Church and a local church...you need them, and they need you. So what gifts do you have and how can you use them?

# WEEK 12

I BELIEVE IN... THE FORGIVENESS  
OF SINS, THE RESURRECTION  
OF THE BODY AND THE LIFE  
EVERLASTING  
**REVELATION 21-22**

## REMEMBER

AND I HEARD A LOUD VOICE  
FROM THE THRONE SAYING,  
“LOOK! GOD’S DWELLING PLACE  
IS NOW AMONG THE PEOPLE,  
AND HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM.  
THEY WILL BE HIS PEOPLE,  
AND GOD HIMSELF WILL BE WITH THEM  
AND BE THEIR GOD.

## REVELATION 21:3

## REJOICE

Here’s a few song for the week  
HYMN OF HEAVEN  
PHIL WICKHAM  
ACQUIRED IN HEAVEN  
BEAUTIFUL EULOGY  
THE BEST IS YET TO COME  
THE JOY ETERNAL

# RECITE

Q. What do you believe concerning the forgiveness of sins?

A. I believe that God, because of Christ's atonement,  
will no more remember my sins,  
nor my sinful nature against which I need to struggle all my life.  
Rather, in grace he grants me the righteousness of Christ  
to free me forever from judgement.

## HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QUESTION 56

Q. What comfort does the resurrection of the body offer you?

A. That not only shall my soul after this life  
be taken up to Christ as my head,  
but also this my flesh raised by the power of Christ  
will be reunited with my soul  
and made like Christ's glorious body.

## HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QUESTION 57

Q. How does the article concerning life everlasting comfort you?

A. Even as I now already experience in my heart  
the beginning of eternal joy,  
so after this life I will have perfect blessedness  
such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard,  
and no human heart has ever imagined:  
a blessedness in which  
to praise God forever.

## HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QUESTION 58

# WEEK 12 / READING 1

## **Text - Revelation 21:1-4**

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

## **Thought**

One of my favourite, guilty pleasure TV shows was Extreme Makeover: Home Edition. Being American, it was big and brash and boisterous...and they basically came in and ripped a house to the ground and rebuilt it in an amazing way the previous occupants could never have imagined. It was a new house, but it was their home, gifted to them.

Revelation describes an extreme makeover...cosmos edition, where God remakes all things...John, the writer, saw in his vision, a new heaven and a new earth...but it was going to be his home, and the home of God's people.

In Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, the experts and the tradespeople moved on and the family were left to look after the house themselves...so no doubt if there was a "10 years later" show, the home might not have been in the same state of repair.

But in Extreme Makeover: Cosmos Edition, God comes to dwell with his people and "There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain..." He will not let that happen again. But as well as his protection from the old order of things, the new order is all about his presence. He will dwell with us, not just maintain our home, but make it his home too.

Lter this week we'll think about the "perfect blessedness" of heaven, as the catechism puts it. But ultimately it comes down to the presence of God, Father, Son and Spirit, dwelling with us after welcoming us home.

### **Therefore**

This week already has had its fair share of the old order of things for many of you. Stand firm in your faith that God is making all things new and one day a new order will prevail and we will dwell with God forever in that perfect blessedness.

# WEEK 12 / READING 2

## **Text - Revelation 21:22-27 / Ephesians 1:7-8**

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

## **Thought**

There's that cliché from doormen and women at venues...

"Your name's not down, you're not coming in."

And then at certain venues what you wore was important...no trainers, no jeans, no sports gear...I remember in my younger days, desperately and badly shopping round town for smart and trendy clothes to wear to an event...I won't describe the outfit I ended up with, let's just say I wasn't the coolest kid in the class.

In Revelation we see the Lamb's book of life...and to enter into the new heaven and the new earth, you need your name down in it. And to have your name on it means you are dressed in purity and not impurely.

How does this all happen...it's what the Creed talks about...the forgiveness of sins. In faith we trust in the crucified and resurrected Jesus and so our names are in the Lamb's book of life.

We quoted Michael Horton on Sunday when he said "that God, instead of wiping out rebels, wipes out our sins" and so the sins what we have committed are wiped off our record in forgiveness, but one day the sin within us will be wiped out completely and we will be able to enter the city...this new heaven and earth, where sin has been wiped out also.

### **Therefore**

Use the catechism question as a declaration of faith today and as a prompt to give thanks in prayer and worship.

What do you believe concerning the forgiveness of sins?

I believe that God, because of Christ's atonement, will no more remember my sins, nor my sinful nature against which I need to struggle all my life. Rather, in grace he grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgement.

# WEEK 12 / READING 3

## **Text - 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-44, 50-57**

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.us.

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Thought**

It's a bit of a longer reading today so a shorter thought from me. The question asked at the start of the passage..."How are the dead raised?"...gets short shrift from Paul. Better to ditch the "How..." and simply ask, "Are the dead raised?" To which Paul gives a resounding yes.

We will rise.

We will be changed.

We will sing, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

We will have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't need to get caught up in the details. Instead we await with confidence the wondrous future we will have with Jesus in a physical, glorified and immortal body that cannot succumb to death and decay!" (Michael Horton...again!)

### **Therefore**

Use the catechism question as a declaration of faith today and as a prompt to give thanks in prayer and worship.

What comfort does the resurrection of the body offer you?

That not only shall my soul after this life be taken up to Christ as my head, but also this my flesh raised by the power of Christ will be reunited with my soul and made like Christ's glorious body.

# WEEK 12 / READING 4

## **Text - Revelation 22:1-5**

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

## **Thought**

The story of the Bible starts with a garden, a river, a tree of life...and the serpent and a curse. And we all have lived under the serpent and curse.

Yet the Bible ends with a city, a river, trees of life...and the Lamb and the promise, "No longer will there be any curse."

In this life, the Lamb frees us from the serpent, through the forgiveness of our sins, and then on the border of this life and the next frees us from the curse by resurrecting our bodies, and welcomes us into a new heaven and new earth where the curse is no more...the life everlasting.

And of course, as the catechism says, it's a perfect blessedness such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has ever imagined.

In this world the curse infiltrates all things, and although we might experience the beginning of eternal joy, we have never experienced or can't even imagine what is to come.

But it is to come. It is certain. It is sure.

## **Therefore**

Use the catechism question as a declaration of faith today and as a prompt to give thanks in prayer and worship.

How does the article concerning life everlasting comfort you? Even as I now already experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, so after this life I will have perfect blessedness such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has ever imagined: a blessedness in which to praise God forever.

# WEEK 12 / READING 5

## **Text - Ephesians 2:4-7**

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

## **Thought**

Over the past 12 weeks exploring the Apostles' Creed, I have been hugely grateful to Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, a professor and a preacher from the 1500s who wrote the Heidelberg Catechism.

Question 22 challenges all of us about what we believe...

What, then, must a Christian believe?

All that God promises us in the gospel, which the articles of our undoubted Christian faith, confessed throughout the world in the Apostles' Creed, teach us in a summary.

...and leads into a series of questions that work beautifully and movingly through the Creed, the summary of all God promises in the gospel...that is that because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy...dealt with our past, made us alive in the present and promises us a future experiencing the incomparable riches of his grace...all through his Son.

And so through the Holy Spirit, "given to me, to make me share, by true faith in Christ and all his blessings" we experience the help, the blessings articulated in question 58

How, though, does it help you now that you believe all this? Now, in Christ, I am righteous before God, and an heir of everlasting life.

The Creed is there to remember, and recite...but in and of itself it is simply words, it is the truth of the Gospel that it points us to in the word of God that we rest on in true faith and receive Christ and all his blessings.

### **Therefore**

So after 12 weeks can you remember and recite the Creed? If you can, take some time today to work through it, not just saying the words, but pondering and giving thanks for the truth they point you to!

**I BELIEVE IN GOD,**  
THE FATHER ALMIGHTY,  
CREATOR OF  
HEAVEN AND EARTH.  
**I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST,**  
HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD,  
WHO WAS CONCEIVED  
BY THE HOLY SPIRIT,  
BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY,  
SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE,  
WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED,  
AND WAS BURIED;  
HE DESCENDED TO THE DEAD.  
ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN;  
HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN,  
HE IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF  
THE FATHER,  
AND HE WILL COME TO JUDGE THE  
LIVING AND THE DEAD.  
**I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT,**  
THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH,  
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS,  
THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS,  
THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY,  
AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING.

## **GROWING & GOING**

/AS FAMILY  
/AS FOLLOWERS  
/IN PRAYER

/WITH THE  
/GOOD NEWS  
/OF JESUS