

## **A Memorable Weekend!**

I am writing this News Letter in the week after our 128<sup>th</sup> Church Anniversary Weekend, which was a great encouragement to all who were able to participate in it. The weekend was characterised by some very stimulating, encouraging and challenging ministry from God's Word; wholehearted singing; outstanding soloists; good attendances; and excellent food! Let me say a very big thank-you to all of you who contributed to making the weekend such a success, as we give God all the praise and glory for what he was pleased to accomplish amongst us.

I am sure all of us will have taken away some 'pearls of wisdom' from the outstanding Bible ministry we received from Revd Craig Dyer. His theme for the weekend was '*Staying on Track*'.

### ⇒ **The Story so far**

On Saturday evening, he spoke from Acts 11.19-26 about the Church at Antioch, drawing parallels with our own situation in Gateshead.

- He reminded us that *every enemy attack is an opportunity for the Gospel to advance*. Just as some who had suffered persecution in the first century found their way to the church at Antioch (v19), so many who have suffered persecution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have found their way to Gateshead, and we have been glad to welcome many from overseas into our fellowship.
- Craig also reminded us that *there is no such thing as 'the wrong kind of people' as far as our Gospel outreach is concerned*. The Church at Antioch broke new ground in taking the Gospel to non-Jews (v20). Many would have regarded such people as unlikely candidates for conversion, compared to those who already had a working knowledge of the one true God. But "*the Lord's hand was with them*" [i.e., with those who chose to be adventurous and break new ground], "*and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord*". We must believe that the Lord can save 'unlikely' people in Gateshead too, those with no prior church background – and that he will do so through us! The Gospel messengers in Antioch were unnamed, ordinary believers.

- Craig reminded us too of the importance of both *believing* the Gospel and *turning* to Christ for salvation. Repentance and faith are like a pair of shoes – both are essential for advance (v20)!
- Our attention was drawn to *what we covet most but can't create, namely God's grace* (v23). There was visible evidence of it in the church at Antioch, and we can praise God for every sign of his grace at work in DRBC too.
- We were also reminded of the twin priorities of *teaching and training* (v26). As God's people, we are called to give ourselves to learning about Jesus, and how he would have us live, in order for our lives to be pleasing to him.

### ⇒ **The Way up is Down**

On Sunday morning, Craig brought us a powerful message from 1 Peter 5.6. The world's way is to be pushy, but God stands in opposition to the proud – and pride goes before every failure in his Church. We were reminded that *humility is the key to blessing*. This is a tremendous encouragement to us all. God doesn't expect us to contribute something that's beyond our capabilities, in order for us to receive his blessings. He simply expects us to make ourselves available to him in humble, sacrificial service. Over-confidence is often a reason for spiritual failure in church life, as well as in our own personal lives. But humility paves the way for God's blessings.

### ⇒ **A Working Model**

On Sunday evening, Craig highlighted various features of the Church at Thessalonica, as Paul provides us with a 'cutaway model' of its inner workings, in 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10.

- We were reminded of *every church's true source of power: God's Holy Spirit* (v5).
- But Spirit-inspired preaching calls for *receptive hearers* (v6; 2.13). The mark of God's message being well received is that it is welcomed with joy, not resisted. True believers are willing to endure suffering for their faith, so following in the footsteps of Jesus himself.
- We were also reminded that *the Gospel spreads through words and deeds*. The Gospel must be visible for it to be credible; it needs to be seen in our lives as well as heard from our lips (vs 3,8).

If you missed any of these teaching sessions, you missed out on a feast of good things! However, the messages have all been recorded, so if you would like to borrow the tapes, let me know.

### ***An Exciting Future***

Over recent weeks, we have been grateful to John Singleton (the NBA's mission man) and to Paul Newman (the minister of Whitley Bay Baptist Church) for introducing various outreach and discipleship resources to us. The deacons have carefully considered how these can best be used, and have come up with the following suggestions.

#### ⇒ ***Autumn 2005: the START course***

- We are looking forward to *An Evening with Syd Little* on *Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November* as our major outreach event of the autumn. Syd Little, one half of the famous *Little and Large* variety act, became a Christian a few years ago and will be sharing his testimony with us. We received a tremendous encouragement last month from the Baptist Union's Green Shoots Fund, who gave us a grant of £570 towards the event, £200 more than we had asked for!
- The *START Course* is a six-session video-based enquirers course, produced by CPAS. We believe it will be very suitable as a follow-up course to Syd Little's visit. So we are proposing to use our midweek meetings from mid-September to early November to pilot the course with a view to running it for enquirers from late November through to mid-January, with a break for the Christmas/New Year holiday season.

#### ⇒ ***Spring 2006: 40 Days of Purpose***

The *40 Days of Purpose* material is based on Rick Warren's bestselling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. It is an in-depth discipleship course, which has proved a great blessing to the many churches worldwide that have run it. The course will run for seven to eight weeks, culminating in Easter Sunday celebrations. The material will be taught through our Sunday services and also small group meetings midweek. Participants will be encouraged to purchase Rick Warren's book for personal study. Some of the teaching material is provided by the author on video.

#### ⇒ ***Summer 2006: Lost for Words***

*Lost for Words* is a CPAS course that has been designed to encourage people to share their faith naturally. We hope to run it at our midweek meetings during the summer of 2006, using our Sunday evening services to explore the subject further.

#### ⇒ ***Autumn 2006: Mind the Gap***

*Mind the Gap* is an Agape training course, which explores practical approaches to evangelism. It recognises that the gulf between churchgoers and non-churchgoers is often very large in our society today. So the course suggests appropriate strategies for bridging the gap. It comprises six 90-minute sessions on various topics, so we will probably take two midweek meetings for each topic during the autumn of 2006, again with appropriate messages on Sunday evenings to reinforce the teaching.

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The deacons were all very excited about this programme of training courses, as we thrashed out the details at our April meeting, so much so that our Church Secretary was moved to comment that it was the best deacons meeting he had ever attended - and he has been a deacon for many, many years! Please join with us in praying for all these opportunities to be trained for effective outreach and in practical discipleship.

### ***A much-loved member***

At a service of thanksgiving and remembrance last month, we celebrated the life and home-call of one of our oldest members, Mrs Phoebe Newton. Phoebe was a much-loved member of our fellowship, a woman of true faith and spirituality. Right up until her recent admission to hospital, she served faithfully as a co-leader of our weekly Ladies Meeting. Our thoughts and prayers are with her extended family, who mourn their sad loss; we especially remember Paul Harris, one of Phoebe's grandchildren and a deacon of the Church. For me, Phoebe epitomised the words:

***For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.***

[Philippians 1.21]

May we all follow her wonderful example.

**David Hunt**