

KINGS NORTON BAPTIST CHURCH

Sunday 22nd May 2022 10 am

Suffering for good

Welcome to all

Opening Scripture

Hymn MP 31 Amazing Grace

Scripture Isaiah 50 (page 737)

Prayer

Children's talk Reverse of embroidered stitching

Chorus MP 378 Jesus shall take the highest honour

MP 570 Reign in Me, Sovereign Lord,

Notices Church members meeting, Safe Families, KN clinic

Prayer time

Reading Philippians 1: 12-21 (page 1178)

Hymn MP 1003 My Jesus My Saviour

Sermon Sovereign God

Hymn MP 645 The God Abraham Praise

Closing Prayer:

Close



Prayer & Exordium

- I don't suppose there's anyone here who watches reality TV - with all its vulgarity!! No, Good. There, laid bare, is the basest of modern human interaction. ... Go back several hundred years and you would be witnessing something similar when visiting a Shakespeare play. William Shakespeare had a strong 'auricular memory', that is he could remember what was said in just about every conversation he had had. That was then played out in the real life-like exchanges on stage - famous for its contemporary realism.

Yet every word was scripted. Hold up 'As you like it'

- Indeed as Shakespeare coined "all the world is a stage and the men and women merely players."

Yes there is a backstage, yes there is a director's chair, yes there is a script.

Behind the visible is an invisible world – directed by God. God is Sovereign over all that happens, all that happens throughout his vast creation.

As we continue to look at the letter to the church in Philippi, we come to v12 **Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.** Here is our key verse this morning.

It prompts the question "how do you see set-backs?" you do have them ? !

We understand cause and effect, run around the room and you end up bumping into something or falling over. But it is not just physical, we can also understand the greedy person being miserable, or the lazy person becoming depressed.

What we can't understand is when something happens which appears to be completely contrary to what we expect. Those oxymorons! How can the imprisonment of someone actively promoting the gospel to the world - be considered for the better?!

- ✚ How can something we see as bad - actually be for the good?

Paul had come to Philippi, and through the preaching of the Gospel and the conversion of Lydia the church had been founded. The Lord Jesus opened her heart to respond to the gospel. That is necessary for anyone is saved.

Paul had had a tough time in that city, remember he along with Silas ended up in prison, but the Lord was at work and the church grew. Here he is writing some time later to see how they are faring. It is not clear where Paul is writing from, most likely it's Rome, but it is clear that he has been imprisoned. Paul, the champion for the gospel, the leader, the inspirer, the

great defender of the faith the one who has sought with his great vision to bring the whole Roman world to hear the gospel, Paul this chosen Apostle – is now banged up in prison. Oh no. What a disaster! All are asking “how will this movement progress? How will the gospel continue to spread?” There must have been a wave of despondency among his followers, - what now?

Paul answers that question. Now **I want you to know, brothers**, x2 **that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.**

‘No’ says Paul, it has not hindered but helped, it is not a reverse but an advance, don’t see this as a defeat. You can trust in a sovereign God.

That’s the issue – how to look at seemingly negative events. How do you look at things?

✚ **Ultimately comes down to how you see God. x2**

Of course - If you don't see God then it is all very different.

All you have is the physical laws of cause and effect. When they run out, - and they do so very quickly – then it is all ‘chance’, confusing, chaotic, frightening, a ‘disaster’ can strike at any moment.

■ **Front of Professional Engineering magazine ‘destination unknown’**

Anything can happen at any time, and with no God I can only see it in relation to how it affects me, or what I wish for, or what others tell me, or what the authorities tell me. **Like the war in Ukraine, to many it is terrible, to those in Russia it is good, ‘military exercises’ necessary to protect mother Russian.**

But what is God doing in this war? Revealing human nature? Certainly. Is he bringing his judgments against evil, Yes. But is he also drawing many to the Saviour? Most likely. And he is showing the Glory of Jesus through the love and power of His people as Ukrainian Christians work together with Russian Christians to help those in need. And more we don’t know about.

But without God then there’s only me - and that is scary.

■ **A boss at L/R, an athletic family man who in one year saw his health taken away, his children leave home and a change of management which left him redundant. His struts were knocked from him - and ended up bereft, broken.**

For those without God, there is only a miserable attempt at wishful thinking, “*Every cloud has a silver lining*” really?? and to battle on through. The result? - usually resentment.

2a

Yet God is there...x2 Am 4:13 **He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth—the LORD God Almighty is his name.**

The word ‘Sovereignty’ is often misunderstood or mis-represented. A sovereign is a ruler. Rulers, monarchs, sovereigns these days are stripped of their power, - not then. When we read the word ‘Sovereign’ in the Bible it is always linked with God as Sovereign or God as the most High God. The phrase ‘Sovereign Lord’ appears nearly 300 times in NIV.

1. Sovereignty does not mean just that ‘He knows’ x2 what will happen like a good fortune teller.
2. Sovereignty does not mean just that he ‘allows’ things to happen x2.
3. Sovereignty means he wills things to happen.

God is the ruler, He rules over all of his creation - the big – but also the small – Jesus said: **Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.** Mt 10:29

✚ **Do not strip God of his sovereignty. x2. Of course we don’t understand how His will also includes my choices – folded into his greater will.**

For example, the cruel Assyrian army invaded the land of Israel. They thought they were so strong that every country would succumb to them, they boasted of their strength. Yet it was God’s will to use them for his purposes – and then punish them for their pride and arrogance.

God used them to bring judgment on Israel. Their plan was actually under God’s plan. See Isaiah 11

✚ **C.H. Spurgeon described the sovereignty of God as “The most comforting - and yet the most hated doctrine!”**

I don’t like it for it hits my ego head on. Yet to acknowledge God’s rightful place is most liberating. And that is how God made you and I to be – to trust him implicitly – even when everything is going contrary to reason.

■ **That is what the army does, it trains soldiers to do A when every ligament in their body shouts ‘do B’. The soldier does it because there is someone above him who is wiser and knows more. And because he trust him with his life - He submits to this greater will.**

Back to Philippi...

The Christians at Philippi heard of what had happened to Paul and saw it as the worst possible news. They really didn’t know what to make of it and in their young faith assumed the worst.

2b

Paul pre-empts their question: **Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.**

“Ok Paul, how does this imprisonment turn out for good?”

He gives some reasons - **13 As a result**, x2 **it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.**

“Who is this prisoner?” people ask. “And what is he in for?” so goes the probing questioning. The reply “He’s in prison because of someone called Jesus who Paul says has returned from the grave”....etc etc.

See the effect of Paul’s arrest and imprisonment? V13 **As a result** then

V14 **Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.**

What happens when the leader is taken away? Now what? What should we do now he’s gone? There’s a simple answer, - pick up the batten x2.

It is easy not to do much when someone else is doing it. But when they are suddenly taken away – it is now down to you.

During WWII when many Army officers are killed, - suddenly young soldiers find themselves taking charge – they have to. This happened to my father, suddenly he was in charge of a large number of men as they retreated to the beaches at Dunkirk.

What about here? If I am ill or run over by a no.18 bus or possibly even arrested, What would you do? Phone up the BU? You are the Church!

Paul’s bold stand has made others bold. X2

v15-17 shows some are speaking about Jesus to stir up trouble.

But Paul who has his eye fixed on Jesus says: v18 **But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.** *Christ is preached!*

✚ **We all know there’s no such things as bad publicity!**

■ The war has made President Zelensky a household name all over the world. So Jesus had become known all over the Roman world.

■ The persecution of Christians caused Jesus to be increasingly known – and how terrible that suffering can be - yet many were so impressed with the stand and courage of the believers - that they too became Christians.

Paul is end-centered, God centered, he is not thinking about himself, he is thinking about how this will further the honour of Christ and His Kingdom.

Our plans are straight, we like a straight road. No sharp bends, no bumps...just get straight there. See bulletin.

God’s plan is bumpy – But God’s purpose is to use us every step of the way
So when difficulties come ask: “how will God bring himself Glory in this?”

The God we're invited to trust is the One who governs the universe — **You alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.** Ps 83:18
Hi governs everything, Jeremiah asks, "**Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?"** Lam 3:37.

No one can act outside God's sovereign will - nor change it.

✚ As Augustine wrote "Nothing . . . happens unless the Omnipotent wills it to happen: he either permits it to happen, or he brings it about himself."

✚ Philip Hughes said, "Under God . . . all things are without exception fully controlled — despite all appearances to the contrary."

Nothing is too large or small to escape God's governing hand. The spider building its web in the corner (or in our case moths!) and Napoleon – or Putin - marching his army across Europe - are both under God's control.

✚ Like that jigsaw, he connects all the pieces, like the tapestry all those threads make sense - he sees the right side - we only see the back.

So too under God's control.is your insomnia, that ailment, that stolen credit card, that family upset. What is happening with you? what trouble? what difficulty? what accident have you had?

✚ See bulletin - the pyramid - he can convert trouble into a good purpose.

4. If you do not know Jesus they all this will remain a mystery to you, you will not be able to make head or tail of it.

5. If you belong to the Lord then though you do not understand it - you trust him in it - and through it. So I do not worry – I trust him.

As God's rule is invincible, so it is incomprehensible. **His ways are higher than our ways** Is 55:9. **His judgments are unsearchable, and His paths are beyond tracing out** Rom 11:33. It is therefore wrong to question His sovereignty simply because you do not understand what He is doing.

■ You are here in Kings Norton, why? Because God wants you here. From Ghana, from Hong Kong, from Eritrea, why? Because God wants you here. It is all in his plan and for his purposes.

That plan also includes suffering x2

see v29 “**For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,**” don't understand what he is doing? He is still in charge so you can still trust Him. – Paul knew that: **And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.**

Do you like to cook with spices? Spices are most fragrant when burnt and bruised. So it is in hard times that Godly character is most fragrant. Here lies one of the benefits of affliction, it fetches out latent sweetness and light. Certain herbs yield no smell till they are trodden on, and certain characters do not reveal their excellence till they are tried. Faith, patience, endurance and steadfastness are by far the best seen when put to the test by adversity, pain, and temptation. Thomas Manton

How different your life will be when you realize that suffering is part of God's plan for you. Don't listen to the world around shouting “avoid every hardship, suffering is bad”. We live in a risk averse, comfort obsessed age.

✚ *If you profess Christ then in one way or another, whether little or much, you will suffer. x2*

Paul said “**I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. ... I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,**” (Php 3:4-10 NIV)

Beware of an easy gospel, never say “come to Jesus and all will be well”, No to come to Jesus you must forsake all,. You must have Him before your family, your plans, your health, yourself. To have Him you must forsake all. Let no-one deceive other into thinking there is no cost in following Jesus.

By life or by death

The key principle is in v 20 **I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.** x2

✚ *Soldiers against Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo said: “I don't want to die in my bed, I want to die on the battlefield”*

God's desire is that He will receive Glory from your life... and from your death. in every area, - at every time, - at every point.

If you have turned to follow Jesus then realise that Christ works out everything, yes everything for the good of his people. Rom 8:28

■ *A Pastor Judge Ram spoke of a unforeseen death in the family. The younger brother and the one believer in the family.*

But through his death all the rest of the family became Christians. This older brother is now the pastor of a church in Handsworth.

This young man not only glorified God in his life but also in His death.

So with the missionary Jim Elliot martyred by cannibal tribes in Ecuador – He not only glorified Christ in his life - but also in his death.

Afterwards and as a result many responded to the call to the Mission field. His wife Elizabeth had a life-long testimony and ministry to help believers.

✚ *Jesus will receive Glory in your death as well as your life. Be sure of it.*

Paul the great champion of the faith was arrested and hidden away in prison. How can that be good for the Kingdom? With God it can.

So with Joseph in prison “**You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**” Gen 50:20

Faith is counter intuitive. Abraham in all his tests could not see a way, all seemed contrary to reason – but he trusted that God had a way. So can we!

So it was with Jesus on the cross. What looked like the greatest defeat - was turned into His greatest victory.

God sovereignly rules in the world and his will is the final cause of all things, in the sufferings of Christ, in the sufferings of Christians, in the details of every man's life - and his eternal destiny. God reigns in his universe, exalted over all other claimants to power and authority. **'I am the LORD, and there is no other'** do not belittle God, do not bring him down.

God **'does whatever pleases him'** Ps. 135:6, Believe him, trust him. For he **'works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will'** Eph 1:11.

Trusting God is not ‘Que sera, sera’, ‘what will be, will be’, what happens happens, no. Trusting God is not ‘ishna Allah’ ‘If it is God's will’, that is fatalism, that is passive abandonment.

If that was the case when we become ill we would do nothing about it.

True trust is borne out of relationship – it is not passive but active.

✚ *Trusting God through the difficulties shows true faith, true relationship.*

God is Sovereign - So trust God in your difficulties, trust Him through your difficulties, in every circumstance, whatever happens. **End**

Abraham praise 3rs stanza

The God of Abraham praise, Whose all-sufficient grace
Shall guide us all our happy days, in all my ways.
He is our faithful friend, He is our gracious God;
And He will save us to the end, through Jesu's blood.