



Welcome to our Sunday Service

14th June 2020

Prepared by Mervyn

Psalm 32

1Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

2Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

3When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. **4**For day and night your hand was heavy on me, my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

5Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

6Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

7You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

8I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. **9**Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

10Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. **11**Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Happy Birthday Jane G.

May God bless you as you celebrate!

There is a green hill far away,
outside a city wall,
where our dear Lord was crucified
who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell,
what pains he had to bear,
but we believe it was for us
he hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiven,
he died to make us good,
that we might go at last to heaven,
saved by his precious blood.

There was no other good enough
to pay the price of sin,
he only could unlock the gate
of heaven and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved!
And we must love him too,
and trust in his redeeming blood,
and try his works to do.

Dear Lord, we are so blessed to be in a position where our sins are forgiven and you do not count them against us.

Merciful God, you pardon all who truly repent and turn to you. We confess again that we have not loved you with a pure heart or loved our neighbour as ourselves. Forgive us and free us for joyful obedience through Jesus our Lord. **Amen**



Lessons in Lockdown prepared by Mervyn

One of the biggest things that has impacted us as a family during lockdown has been the cancelling of all of all the GCSE exams. The focal point of years of preparation and the climax of school life suddenly removed, like climbing a mountain only for the summit to disappear just as you are about to get to the top!



This got me thinking about schools, exams and tests and I want to start this talk by celebrating the fact that

Jesus passed with flying colours every test that human beings have consistently failed since the dawn of time. When he was tested at the beginning of his public ministry, we see Satan using his most subtle, targeted and seductive temptations to trap Jesus into materialism, pride and self indulgence. However, Jesus physically weak after 40 days of fasting overcame the enemy!

Here are some subjects that matter to God...

Holiness, Obedience, Humility, Righteousness, Truthfulness, Selflessness, Kindness, Patience, Justice and Compassion!



Some humans have done quite well in some of these subjects, throughout history and today, but none have passed. The tug of sin in our lives trips us up at some point. However, Jesus has completely passed, and not with just a high level across most areas, but with 100%, and so demonstrating how human beings were intended to live in their relationship with God and other people. Jesus has fulfilled God's pass mark in everything. He delighted in doing his fathers will, now any of us can exchange our fail for his perfect pass! Humanity has been set free to live in a new way and the fear of being exposed by failure has been cancelled for us!

Through out the Old Testament, we see good people coming to the fore to lead Gods people, but failing at some point as the enemy of God's people, Satan is able to appeal to their sinful nature and successfully cause them to fail the test, with terrible consequences at times. **BUT** with Jesus, we see Satan's kingdom crumbling, as Jesus sinlessly walks towards the cross. We see Satan desperately trying to throw him off course through Peter, Pilate, and the taunts of the soldiers. The Devil knows that if the "Spotless Lamb of God" is sacrificed his grip on humanity is broken.

A verse from the hymn There is a Green Hill Far Away sums it up like this...

**There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin,
he only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.**



With the idea of teaching and testing in mind, let's think of Jesus as a teacher and us as his students (disciples). I've been thinking a lot about the disciples recently; this small, random group of unique characters that Jesus took under his wing to teach and train in God's ways and values. This group of 12 pupils and one teacher laid a foundation that changed the world and continues to bring challenge, comfort and radical transformation to the lives of millions!



Matthew, Thomas, James, Simon, Philip, Bartholomew,
Peter, Andrew, James, John, Judas & Thaddeus

Little test... Can you name the disciples?

Today, let's eaves drop on just one of their lessons!

Read Matt 5: 1-2 and 6: 16-18

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,² and he began to **teach** them.

¹⁶ "When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

I feel led to this little bit of teaching on fasting as we are all experiencing a kind of social fasting at the moment. No parties, no eating out with friends at a coffee shop or restaurant, no church services, no concerts, no weddings etc

I also have been thinking about fasting following a conversation with a good friend who has cut sugar out of his diet for 5 days a week. I'm struck that he appreciates chocolate so much more now he only has it on 2 out of 7 days!



So what can we learn from this short reading.

1, **When...** When you fast, not if you fast! This is something Jesus fully expects his followers to engage with at times.

2, **Why,** what good does depriving yourself of something nice achieve? I'm sure there are many answers to this but here are four that come to mind;

- A. Give your spirit person a chance in the driving seat of your life. So much of what we do is driven by a desire to gratify our physical needs/wants.
- B. Heighten spiritual awareness and make space for intimacy with God. Man shall not live by bread alone... more alive!
- C. Develop self-control and establish wise and healthy boundaries. Not mastered by the flesh. Heightened appreciation of God's provision and the needs of others.
- D. Greater spiritual authority and experience new levels of freedom. Sometimes essential in spiritual warfare and deliverance ministries.

3, **How?** Do it in secret! God is not pleased or impressed by spiritual performances. There is something deeply ingrained in us that loves the praise and approval of others, but God knows that human praise can never satisfy our soul and it is so fickle.

We were thinking last week about Ananias and Sapphira who conspired to put on a spiritual performance to make themselves look good, and to deceptively win the admiration of people - we saw how that way of living steals the joy of true relationship and is deathly.



The promise in these verses is wonderful - Firstly if you secretly fast, you can be assured you have God's attention; he is watching you and secondly he will reward you in some way!

However, I know that being content with just God knowing makes us face our heart motives. I remember years ago when putting a substantial gift into the church collection wanting to put in a cheque rather than cash, so at least the church treasurer would know how much I'd given!! I guess it's a combination of a lack of faith - in case God didn't see and pride - wanting someone else to think well of me.

I love this little story of a girl who was willing to look clumsy and get into trouble to stop another person being teased. A young boy at school in second grade had accidentally wet himself among a group of friends. The girl spotted what had happened and knew that if the other boys noticed, they would mercilessly tease him. Not only that, but the girls in the group would never let him forget it! His street cred was in tatters and he was close to tears. Quickly, she got some water in a glass and as she walked past him pretended to stumble, spilling the water over his trousers. She got into a little trouble with the teacher but she had made a friend for life!

This is a teeny, tiny reflection of what Jesus did on the cross for us, He came to our rescue and got into serious trouble to save us from our shame, disgrace and punishment.



Also, ***the secret place*** in our lives is where many of us struggle with private sin and shame . People struggle with secret drinking habits; many struggle with secret internet habits, some struggle in secret with eating disorders or gambling . Fasting is a secret activity that can strengthen us in our personal battles and lead toward a secret world full of beauty rather than shame.

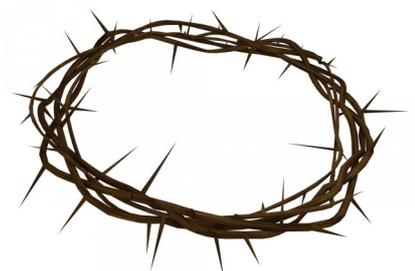
Past hurts and abuse from other people is something else we sometimes push into the secret places of our lives. God wants his love, healing and forgiveness to restore these places too. Fasting can play a part in unlocking this hurt.

Doing good things in secret is a wonderful way of building up treasure in heaven and nurtures a rich and wholesome inner world. In today's world, posting things on social media can be a great way of communicating and staying in touch, but it also carries a temptation to attempt to gain affirmation and approval from others. Developing a quality secret world with God is a wonderful antidote.

Angela spoke a couple of weeks ago about gardens in The Bible; sometimes our inner lives are a bit like a secret garden.

Here are some words from a song that I find helpful

You are a garden, a place where seeds are sown,
and as the years go by you'll find flowers and weeds have grown.
And so you need to know there's a gardener
who has encountered cruel thorns before.
He'll take your weeds and give you seeds of gladness and he'll take care of you for evermore.



This is just one tiny part of Jesus teaching from his famous Sermon on the Mount, so...

Are you excited at being in God's discipleship school?

The disciples were just ordinary people who responded to Jesus call to follow him. Jesus also calls us to be his disciples in his unique school where he has achieved the 100% that we never could, and he willingly shares his perfect grades with us!

Does this mean we don't have to bother?

Well, there is nothing we can do to add to what Jesus has done for us, but when confronted with such love and grace, our hearts are motivated to work even harder, not because we have to, but because we want to; our hearts are set free to serve him and to learn his ways.

Jesus invites us in Matthew 11:29 to learn of him and in John 14:12 he assures us that we can do the kind of things he does. We are his body on earth and have a part to play in fulfilling his plan to reconcile the world to himself and living out his kingdom values.

How do we access Jesus qualifications for ourselves?

Repentance! By telling Jesus the truth about yourself! It's possibly to be involved with lots of Christian / church activity, **but** not actually have a relationship with Jesus! Jesus wants to know you personally, he doesn't want religious activity, he wants our hearts. Tell him all about your fears and failings, confess your sins and weaknesses. Let him into the heart of who you are.

In Matt 7:23 Jesus says I never knew **you**... to people who were very confident in their spiritual CV. The only thing you need on your spiritual CV is - Jesus knows me! And Jesus can never say he doesn't know you if you humbly tell him what you're really like!!



An assignment for the week!

Some homework! Why not fast from something this week, perhaps a meal or particular food, or choose to miss a favourite TV show or have some time free from social media! Use the time to talk to God or memorise some part of the bible or do a secret good thing for someone etc. But, make sure you don't tell anyone, it's just between you and Jesus!

“The discipline of fasting breaks you out of the worlds routine.”