

Sunday 27/12/2015

**The importance of remembering
Deuteronomy 8:1-11**

The memory of 2015 will bring mixed emotions. For some it's been a very difficult year and others will have come in to new and exciting challenges, but whatever has happened to us, God remains the same. He is the sure foundation on which we rest.

I wanted for us to reflect on some of the things God has spoken to us about in 2015.

Don't despise the Word of God

When we hear God's word, we can ignore it, we can rationalise it, in other words, we think it through with our reason only, weighing up the pro's and con's of that we have heard. We filter it through our past experience and look at what the word might mean to us in practice. The cost, the risk, the consequences etc.

We may consider to what degree we are prepared to apply the word to our lives and situations. Perhaps we look at others lives and consider what choices they appear to be making and we set a kind of bench mark as to how far we will go, based on our perception of others.

We may not realise, we are even doing it, but we are putting the word of God through a filter system and often taking out the essential nutrients. We may be despising or treating as of little value or consequence the very word of God.

Jesus wants us to receive His word and to obey without watering it down to make it more palatable.

Meditating on God's word is so different from rationalising it!

Meditating on the word of God, is a positive process that chews over what God is saying so that it can be properly digested. It helps us understand, to a greater extent what God has said with a view to pleasing Him with our response. Godly meditation, abides in Him and brings about regeneration.

We need goodness of heart that forcefully presses towards God. This is how we connect with truth and connection with truth is how we are shaped and transformed into His image.

Our choices are real. God upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices, choices that have real and eternal results, for which we are held accountable.

Phil 2:13

"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

The work of God is not to make us more comfortable, to feel good about ourselves like some kind of 'self help' program, but to transform us, renewing our thinking so that we willingly, even wilfully orient our lives forwards God and press towards Him. For His good pleasure. When we live to please God, we get a deep sense of purpose, meaning and satisfaction. We are blessed with a and enduring joy that's not dependant on circumstance but our relationship to Him.

Looking back

There are both positive and negative aspects to looking back.

Lots wife looked back. She did this despite God's explicit instruction not to. Yet her heart was still in Sodom. She longed for things that she should have left behind.

The crossing of the Jordan, is a type of baptism and marked the burial of the past and walking in newness of life, yet the people longed for their old comforts preferring slavery to the walk of faith.

Jesus said that **"No one who takes hold of the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."**

We will never plough a strait furrow whilst looking back at what once was.

"All scripture is God breathed" we need therefore to take his word seriously and learn the lessons of those who have gone ahead of us. **"these things were written for our learning" so that we would not fall into the same trap.**

Romans 15:4 & 1 Cor 10:11

As I reflect back on some of the words spoken in this last year, I hope they will bring fresh challenge and help us to consider both what God has said and what we have done about in response.

These two questions are vital to our spiritual growth:

What is God saying?

What am I going to do in response?

If we can get in the habit of asking ourselves and one another these questions I believe it will make a big difference to the way we live.

We started the year with a series of teachings on the Kingdom of God and **Malcolm Heading brought to us a word in season from Matthew 6:33.**

This is a scripture many of us will have committed to memory and know so well, yet it came to me and many others in a fresh and challenging way.

So what is the Kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is the place where God is present and reigns.

If the kingdom of God is in my heart, then He is both present there and reigns in my life!

We should long for the presence of God. I am not talking about simulating the presence of God through hyped up worship, lighting and special effects but each of us longing for His presence, crying out for God, praying on our knees before we meet with a deep longing for God to come.

When God spoke to Elijah, it was in the still small voice.

2 Kings 19:11-14 "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice.

So it was when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here Elijah?"

What a personal question and a personal encounter with the living God!

God longs for personal relationship with us.

John Savage quoted recently - **"Christianity that does not begin with the individual, does not begin: Christianity that ends with the individual ends."**

Malcolm Heading spoke about kingdom living being "super normal"

God is bigger than time, space and matter. Jesus walked on water and Phillip was transported supernaturally (super normally!) How is this possible? Because God is beyond comprehension. He made it all and has unlimited power.

The early church demonstrated this super normal lifestyle. People were healed by a passing shadow, a hanky, a word of faith etc. Prison doors were flung open and angels came to their rescue.

How is this possible today? Alignment. Bringing our lives into alignment with the will of God.

People call Him "Lord, Lord and yet continue not to do what He says"

This is where we fail all the time. We just won't pay the price.

Every single person who is serious about alignment with the will of God should be attending prayer meetings and praying at every opportunity.

"They gave themselves to prayer, breaking of bread and the apostles teaching"

Surely these are keys to alignment!

Prayer comes from the whole life, given to God.

Breaking of bread requires self examination and right relationship with God and others.

Repentance and forgiveness in all our relationships.

"What causes fights and quarrels among you....?"

Teaching requires us to make choices. We need to connect with truth and apply our wills.

I would add baptism to this list as well. Walking in newness of life.

I have been crucified with Christ.....

Malcolm said that biblical transformation is a command that requires obedience, it does not happen by "osmosis". You can't sit in church and just hope something will rub off on you. We have to obediently put off our old nature.

The challenge is for us to decide to change, to align our lives with the word of God.

Howard Morgan also brought a word from God. A word that actually confirmed a prophesy Dave had given some months earlier about coming out from the shadow lands.

He spoke about the need for willing hearts. Intentional about our relationship with God.

Why would you want to be connected to the world? Anything in me that's in the shadow lands needs to come into the light. This requires repentance and is a call to go deeper and higher.

You can only go as high as the depth of your foundation will allow.

What is your hearts response to the invitation "there is more for you"?

Will you say "YES" or demean your calling and say it's for someone else?

You may need to come out of the shadow of unbelief, self rejection or it can't be me.

Don't allow lies to take you into the shadows.

God will invite you to higher heights, but not against your will.

The power of self will should not be underestimated. Are you willing, truly willing or are you wilfully rejecting the call to come up higher?

Don't allow lies to determine your destiny. Say yes to God, start now.

I felt very strongly this year that God wanted for us to focus our season of prayer on three aspects of renewal.

- Renewal of our relationship with God (Personal Renewal)
- Renewal of relationship with one another (Relational renewal)
- Renewal of mission

When Gareb and Kaheenah came and spoke to us, I was struck by an answer he gave concerning the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. He said the biggest barrier was that they lose community. They lose family, friends, support networks and are literally shunned by their community. Without a loving church family to come into, they will not be able to come to Christ. Wow! That confirmed my strong conviction, we are on the right track in our vision for a loving Christian community, a family here at Kingsway. We all need this same connectedness to God and one another.

It's biblical and the world we live in has moved so far away from this godly society we long for.

Psalm 85:6

"Will you not yourself revive us (or bring to life) again, that your people may rejoice in you?"

There needs to be a cry for revival within our own hearts. I don't believe the psalmist was complaining or grumbling about the lack of fire, he was crying out for fire to fall. "In His presence there is fullness of joy...."

Anyone who knows this is spoilt for anything less. We are not satisfied by dry religious formality, we long for living water. But why don't we experience this more?

There could be any number of reasons, but primarily, it's because of a lack of personal devotion. An unwillingness to let go of the world and align our lives with the will of God.

Romans 12:1,2

I loved John Savages translation of Paul's words.

"I get down on my knees and I beg you to be different"

This is not a time to be going back. It's not a time to be like the world, but to be a called out people.

We live in a world in which people deny God and often live godless lives. We have come to understand that the desires of the flesh will consume us, but the desire for the life of the Spirit will enrich us.

Paul didn't say we are not to associate with immoral people, if that were the case, he said we would have to leave planet earth! He did however say, not to associate with so called believers who lived immoral lives.

If we stay in close relationship with God and His family, sowing to the spirit, we will become like stars that shine in the darkness, reflecting the glorious light of God.

How different all of us are when we have been with Jesus. Moses must have gone into the tent of meeting with all manner of concerns, but I can imagine as he settled down and looked to God, a completely different Spirit came upon him. His mind was renewed, wisdom and understanding came and he was refreshed, able to face the world and his responsibilities in the power of God rather than His own strength.

We are made for connectedness with God, to discharge his life, display his fruit and to overflow with living water.

John 15:4 Abide with me.....

Our relationship with God is also dependant on our relationship with one another.

Strife and disharmony in relationships drains the life out of you. It's impossible to have close fellowship with God and hold hatred and resentment against another.

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us...."

We have been forgiven the greater debt, yet find it so hard to forgive others who are indebted to us. Instead of forgiving we become book keepers, keeping records of wrongs done against us and I don't believe there's any need for bookkeepers in heaven!

Communion is our regular opportunity to examine our hearts and face the challenge, the real choice of communion with God or to hold onto unforgiveness. It is a choice we make, not a feeling. The feeling of release comes after you have taken the step to forgive.

Roy Morgan spoke recently about the body of Christ and being joined together. It's every joint that supplied. **Dismembered body parts cannot function, it's joints that supply!**

It's satan's ploy to cause separation and division. This happens in individual relationships and in the church. People can drift away or be cut off through offence. Don't take offence! We are all different and can say and do things that hurt, whether we mean to or not. Think the best of one another and resolve differences in love, both by offering genuine forgiveness and through repentance (turning from those behaviours that cause offence)

We are all different. We have a different mix of gifts and talents. Don't envy one another but enjoy being you and serving as best suits you within the body. But do serve, the body needs you!

Another of John's quotes was from a man called Kierkengard who said **"It's so hard to believe, because it's so hard to obey."**

The issue is obedience and our battle is often against the flesh.

Small steps of obedience produce great mountains of faith.

Dave Elms said - **The closer we get to God, the more tender our hearts become.**
Everything got started with God and finds its meaning in Him (Col'1:16)

Proverbs 11:28 (msg)

"A life devoted to things is a dead life, a stump. a God shaped life is a flourishing tree."

The worlds values are so different from the values of God.

J C Rile "He only lives, who lives for God & all are dead beside."

I can't serve God unless something REAL happens in me. If we don't have this real life in us, how can we refresh others?

The pearl of great price will cost everything but is of far greater worth than all we could possibly possess of this world. When we give ourselves to God, he becomes the new owner **of everything**, He graciously lets us use things, but it's all His.

Jesus is the only one who can satisfy and fill the belly, until it overflows. He satisfies the deep longings, the ache that so many feel. I remember in my youth, coming away from parties feeling so desperately empty, with deep longing and disappointment. I don't know what I had hoped, but certainly, coming away a knew this was just not me. There had to be more.

I found in Jesus what truly satisfies and have never once felt that same emptiness after church or a quiet devotional time!

Roy also spoke about our attitude to the world.
How do we see the world and our place in it?

He spoke not just about change (changing our attitude) but **"transformation"**

Our biggest problem is not out there but in our minds and hearts. We are a people who are transformed by the Holy Spirit, the living active word of God.

We are not "of" the world but are "in" the world.

God has a salvation and not a condemnation agenda. "In view of God's mercy"

"As you sent me, so I send them..."

We are sent into the world in the same way Jesus was sent by the Father.

Ephesians starts in the heavenly places seated with the Father but goes on to speak about work, relationships, marriage, family, husbands, wives, children, bosses, servants etc. If it's real in the heavenly places then that reality is demonstrated in the way we live out our lives in the world.

I loved what John Shergold shared about the woman at the well.

It was just another day for her, but God broke through. Within a few minutes of meeting with Jesus she was so full of Joy (not condemnation) that she had to go and tell others.

We need to start to see people as God sees us.

She was once a beautiful, young virgin with hopes and dreams. She had been married 5 times, but did Jesus just see a sinner? He saw someone who had experienced hopes dashed and dreams never fulfilled in a world that appears to offer so much promise but can never satisfy the deep longings of the heart.

Everyone has a story. How true.

We all have a story and there are a lot of lost hurt people without any sense of the love of God.

John 4

The fields are white unto harvest.

There are so many messages that have spoken into people's lives. You may recall God speaking to you in some way.

Matt 6

"Don't lay up for yourself treasures on earth.....where your treasure is, your heart will be."

The object of your desire will set the course of your life.

"But you, man of God pursue..... Lay hold of eternal life."

We see things more clearly, close up so draw near to God.

Mark 8

Healing of the blind man. Was touched a number of times by Jesus and each time he saw more clearly.

Jesus wants to touch us again and again so that we will see more clearly.

The pure in heart see God. Therefore Satan wants to defile and Jesus wants to purify.
We have a will and can chose.