

LOCKDOWN MEDITATIONS
2020 - Part 1
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This booklet is a compilation of Email meditations issued weekly by Pastor Roy Mohon during the Spring and early Summer of the year 2020, during much of which time the entire country was in lockdown in consequence of the Corona Virus pandemic. Rev. Mohon was ministering during this time for the *Presbyterian Reformed Church*, Stockton-on-Tees by services delivered on [facebook.com/prcstockton](https://www.facebook.com/prcstockton) and he provided these meditations on a Thursday each week as a bridge between the Tuesday evening midweek and the following Lord's Day. Details about the church and its services appears at the end of the booklet.

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1. THE PASSOVER

'And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it' (Exodus 12:7)

The Passover was to be kept by the Israelites immediately before the Exodus. They were to eat the Lamb at the family table in their own homes but though they were each in their own home they remained one people. In the mysterious providence of God, this provides us with a Biblical example where segregation was both required by God and blessed by God.

This is no little encouragement to us in a situation where prudence indicates that the safeguarding of life itself requires segregation. Cancelling services to support the national strategy of separation to avoid the mass spread of the Corona virus appears at first sight to be to the great detriment of the worship of God and contrary to our duty. The Passover, however, was designed and intended to be a great blessing to the body of the people, despite their separation from one another. They remained brethren and would be led into great salvation blessings together if they remained faithful.

We do not have difficulty in seeing the logic of the Government strategy of isolation and separation in the circumstances in which the nation finds itself. We accept that we should support this government initiative, which, is prudent in the light of what is known at present of the seriousness of the Corona virus.

I approach things in this way because I think that it is important for us to see the positive side and not be like the unbelieving Israelites in Moses' day because we are to go forward in faith. Indeed, we demonstrated last week the viability of electronic assistance to transmit the Truth beyond the confines of the Bible Centre and we appreciate efforts to make this a workable solution for those not able to be present. We are now reaching the stage where we are not able to be present together in *The Bible Centre* in view of the Government strategy on isolation of the over seventies, minimization of face to face meetings, safeguarding the vulnerable and also caring for our children.

The ability to go forward in faith with electronic means has enabled the Pastor to lead congregational worship at the accustomed times with each in their own homes but nevertheless partaking together in praise, pastoral prayer, scripture being read and heard, the preaching of the Gospel and the pronouncement of the blessing.

The meditations in this booklet were emailed each Thursday to bridge the gap between the midweek and the coming Lord's Day. We remained a congregation and went forward not in a sense of *resignation* but in a spirit of *anticipation* that in these new circumstances God would grant us a blessing as only He can. The meditations are sent out in this booklet with the hope and prayer that many will find blessing in them.

2. "BE OF GOOD CHEER"

These words of the Saviour are found in the Gospel of John Chapter 16 and verse 33. There we read those encouraging words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*".

Here is a statement of fact

"In the world ye shall have tribulation". As Christians we are not strangers to uphill experiences that make us puff and blow. We immediately concur with those words of Eliphaz, "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). By the time we are middle-aged we have usually experienced awkward neighbours or work colleagues, difficult circumstances at home or in employment, health problems and not a little rejection from others because of our Christian profession. We might scarcely use the word 'persecution' when compared to the apostles or many Christians today in various other countries that we know of but we have our share of 'tribulation'. The Greek word translated 'tribulation' has exactly the emphasis of our modern expression 'pressure'. We feel under pressure because of certain circumstances and the situation arising from the Corona Virus has added to the pressure. We might have more time but as a result of the *lock-down* and *social-distancing* we feel more constrained.

Here is a word of exhortation

"But be of good cheer". Despite the reality of trials and temptations and trying to swim against the tide, we might say to our friend who is *downtcast*, "*Cheer-up!*". "*Cheer-up*" is intended as a word of encouragement to stir us to be the very opposite of where we are. Be *up* not *down*. The situation is demanding, says Christ, "*but be of good cheer*". Our English word "cheer" is derived from the French word for "countenance". The face is, generally speaking, so revealing concerning our mood. Let then our expression betray *gladness* of soul not *sadness* of heart. It should not be taken as insensitivity that we try to gladden the day of our friend in difficulties. If an exhortation to be of good cheer were in itself mockery or insensitive, certainly the Saviour would never have used it. *He* was well aware that *we* have cause to take heart and not be overwhelmed. To be 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief' was *Christ's* portion as the sin-bearing Saviour, that *His people* might know the joy unspeakable and full of glory in the knowledge of sin forgiven. He draws alongside, as on the Emmaus Road, and asks, "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" (Luke 24:17). 'He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning *himself*' (Luke 24:27). A Christ-focused outlook is what is needed. Thereafter, the steps of Cleopas and his companion were quickened as they hurried to tell the Good News that Christ is risen indeed.

Here is a word of explanation

"I have overcome the world". Our world has suddenly become a lot stranger. We could travel where we would, be it local or distant. We could meet who we would be they friends or family. We could buy what we would in local shops or markets. Now our world

and that of folk all over the planet has shrunk like an after-party balloon. The 2020/2021 Corona Virus future is full of uncertainty for many. We might think of health workers, the aged, those with pre-existing health conditions, those pregnant mothers who will need hospitalization, those presently on furlough from work, and Joe Bloggs and companions left wondering what will be the end of it all. Amidst all of this, Christians must be of good cheer because we have something utterly stable and unchanging as a result of saving faith in Christ. Is it not a time for Christian faith to shine reflecting the beauty of “the Sun of Righteousness... with healing in his wings”? (Malachi 4:2) In challenging times, have we not cause to say,

“If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32).

3. SUPPORTS TO FAITH

‘Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places’ (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Here are three supports to faith in difficult times.

Remember God’s great mercy

Habakkuk had received a revelation of the coming invasion of the ferocious Chaldeans, which would be a truly fearful event. Humanly speaking, the enemy would have the power of life or death over the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their beautiful city would be destroyed. Agriculture would grind to a halt and food production cease. As we look at our situation today, in consequence of the Corona Virus, it is obvious that things are nowhere near as bad as these circumstances. Homes would be destroyed and food would be in desperately short supply. Apart from some occasional limited shortages, the U.K. population can temporarily emerge from the *lockdown* and find well stocked supermarkets and stores. We may have our longer term economic concerns but as we daily give thanks for the meals God has provided in his great mercy to us let us take heart and entrust all of our needs to the Lord.

Rejoice in the Lord

Our farming continues, our stores are stocked and internet sales are booming. If Habakkuk can write, ‘Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation’, surely we must get beyond resignation to rejoicing. There are indeed important changes in our routine that we miss. We miss being able to motor where we will. We miss being able to see and entertain friends. We miss being able to go up to the House of the Lord

in a physical way and meet together as we rather took for granted as a fixture of life, illness apart. But we must not cease from *rejoicing* in the Lord. In his book, *From Fear to Faith*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones counsels that the Christian must “‘rejoice in tribulation’ and be triumphant in the midst of the worst circumstances. That is the challenge of the Christian position. Herein we as Christians are to differ from the world. When hell is let loose, and the worst comes to the worst, we are to do more than ‘put up with it’ or ‘be steady’. We are to know a holy joy and manifest a spirit of rejoicing. We are to be ‘more than conquerors’, instead of merely exercising self-control with the aid of an iron will. We are to rejoice in the Lord and to joy in the God of our salvation” (page 71).

Reflect upon the source of our strength

Habakkuk confesses, ‘The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places’ The reference to deer’s feet points to more than treading *carefully*. Surely it points to treading *confidently*. Not that we place our confidence in ourselves. We must be looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith and we shall not do so in vain. He being the eternal Word made flesh and dwelling among men, even our Immanuel, ‘God with us’, we declare with Habakkuk, in every adversity, ‘The LORD God is my strength’. The Almighty will not fail. The Calvary Saviour will not fail. The Holy Spirit of love and truth will not fail.

4. THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

I am the way, the truth and the life. (John 14:6)

These words of the Lord Jesus Christ come in answer to the question of Thomas, ‘Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?’ (John 14:5). We find the hard questions in life disturbing. They disclose our inadequacy and that is uncomfortable for us and many are, no doubt, feeling so at this time. We do not know the answers.

Christ the Way

The second ‘lockdown’ is due to finish and what is the way ahead now? Some are for total relaxation and others are not. It could be rather challenging if the decision was left to us. Certainly to go the wrong way could be a disaster. If we meet the wrong person and get ill, the consequences could be fatal. Simple life choices, like going shopping, have become a matter of life or death. Few realize that it is so even without the Corona virus. The ancient proverb states, ‘There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.’ (Proverbs 14:12). The Bible teaches that, *always*, Jesus Christ as the way is the only safe way of life. To know him and the power of his resurrection is the only way to know true joy and peace in believing.

Christ the Truth

People are wondering about the truth. What is the truth about the origin of the Corona virus? Is it man-made, a laboratory accident or a natural occurrence? Will we ever get the truth of the matter? We cannot be sure about this at present but we can be sure about the really big questions of life like: What will happen to me if I do die? or Where will I spend eternity? When Jesus Christ speaks of himself as 'the truth' it involves the claim to be able to provide answers to the really big questions. I am not saying that the question, 'Will I die?' is not a big question for us when we are ill but there are bigger questions and Jesus Christ has the answer to them all. He has personal experience of Heaven and Hell, of eternal life and damnation and gives us right answers and offers us hope through faith in him for forgiveness, life and salvation.

Christ the Life

It is implicit in Government deliberations and planning at the moment that going in the wrong direction costs lives. We can be thankful that we are not called upon to make decisions that may be of grave rather than good consequence. When I hear people on the radio criticizing and complaining, I think, be thankful you do not have to make the decisions because the Saviour has said that we will give an account for every word and likewise for our every decision. To meet God in judgement without the Saviour can only result in eternal death for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But the Saviour says, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'. By his atoning death at Calvary, Christ secured forgiveness, justification and everlasting life for all who trust in him. It is something to think about and to share with others as Death rides abroad on his pale horse among us (Revelation 6:8).

5. TREASURES

'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth' (Matthew 6.19a)

The call to consideration

God calls we humans to consideration in one principal way. He sent his Word through Moses, psalmists, prophets and in due course His Son with apostles and preachers after him. God also calls through his providence. Events, personal, family, global or national call us to consideration. We are at such a juncture now! Following hard upon the heels of our medical crisis is the looming economic downturn expected to be the worst in about 70 years. The reduced economic activity produced by the Corona Virus lockdown leads some to expect a 25% reduction in GDP making recession inevitable and inflation painful. It calls us to consider our attitude to possessions. Are we materialistic or spiritually minded? The Lord Jesus Christ would have his disciples to have a spiritual disposition avoiding secularism and greed. 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal' (Matthew 6.19). It is not just that greed and selfishness are sinful, they are futile. They raise the question of Proverbs 23.5, 'Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is

not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven'. This is now a real worldwide expectation.

The choice before everyone

This all sounds very worrying but it should not be so to Christians. The Lord's teaching is apposite. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6.20). Believers in Christ are urged to spirituality not materialism. There is a wasting treasure and an enduring treasure. Those who put Christ before cash may become poorer financially but not spiritually and eternally. There is such a difference between wasting and enduring treasure. Joy and peace in believing is founded not on cash but on Calvary, where the Saviour made peace by the shedding of his blood as the sacrificial Lamb of atonement and reconciliation. The choice before everyone is, Will you prefer perishable possessions to the Prince of Peace?

The challenge to be faced

The challenge facing everyone is, Where is your treasure? Is it here in this world to be left to others and burned up at the last or is it with Christ and eternally secure? The times challenge us to prioritize heavenly treasure, 'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Matthew 6.21). When we do prioritize heavenly treasures, each day is filled with greater joy and peace in believing.

6. MARTHA AND MARY

'Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick' (John 11.3)

Christ's Love

It is a great comfort in our times of trouble to be reminded of the Saviour's love. Martha and Mary had their faults like the rest of us but it was a great strength that they were persuaded of the Saviour's love. In extremity they resorted to Christ with a confidence that he cares because they had experimental knowledge of that care. John, himself, had witnessed the Saviour's compassion towards this family and writes, 'Now Jesus *loved* Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus' (verse 5). Each true believer has warrant to insert his or her name in the list of those whom Christ loves. We have that beautiful revelation in John 13.1, 'Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end'. We must conclude that as Christ died to save us, he must have a most wonderful love for us and so we take heart in adversity.

Christ's Lordship

We accept that our love has its limits when it comes to situations of distress. There are many things that we would do if we could. A loving mother rushes to pick up her fallen child. When our children grow to maturity, we may have to look to them to pick us up! And brothers and sisters must also love and help one another. But Martha and Mary were aware that things had passed beyond their competence regarding their sick brother and they send to the 'Lord'. They could look to the Lord as one in complete control. Distress in the life of the believer should bring us to reflect upon the Saviour's absolute control of all circumstances because he is the omnipotent Son of God. Liberalism, by seeking to reduce Jesus to a mere human example would rob us of the comfort of Christ's personal total sufficiency. The Apostle John would have us know that the Word made flesh (John 1.14) has an absolute sufficiency to answer to our needs.

Christ's Lesson

Christ has a lesson for us from circumstances long ago. His ways are inscrutable but edifying for those who believe. He has heard of Mary and Martha's extremity but John continues, 'When he had heard therefore that he (Lazarus) was sick, *he abode two days still* in the same place where he was' (John 11.6). The absence of immediate response is a great challenge to our faith during our extremities but must never lessen our confidence in Christ's compassion or omnipotent help. Hope must not be nullified by adverse providences but stimulated. The prayer that crisis demands and draws forth is intensified by what *The New Thompson Chain-Reference Bible* indexes as 'Divine Delays'. We are in a time of need and that in itself is a call to prayer. We do, I believe, love one another and that is a precious resource. So as the Corona storm continues, let us 'pray one for another', including 'that ye may be healed' for 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much' (James 5.16). We cannot have exhaustive knowledge of each one's burdens or healing needs but, in this unusual vale of tears, let us bear up one another, praying for each family: parents, children (grown up or in their minority), and, may I add on behalf of my generation, grandparents. Let us *send to the Lord* for one another's particular needs whether we know all the details or not. We all have our needs, trials and sorrows calling for prayerful support.

'Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living' (1 Kings 3.23).

The wisdom of Solomon

The two harlots flatly contradicted one another as they stood before Solomon the king. There were no other witnesses. What was he to do? We are told that 'the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgement' (1 Kings 3.28) and you can read of his unique solution in verses 23-27 of 1 Kings 3. The rose garden encounter between Dominic Cummings on the one hand and the press on the other was similar to the two women in that one said one thing about his movements arising from the Corona Virus and the other said another 'and never the twain shall meet' as we say. Various open-air preachers have found themselves verbally abused as 'law-breakers' only to be cleared in court. The law was not what their opponents considered it to be or wanted it to be. This weaponizing of Law in order to character assassination or worse needs a firm rebuff from the Christian community. We need to insist that in a matter of dispute about whether the Law has been broken, we have a civilized process to determine the issue by resort to our courts of law. It is not for every Tom, Dick or Harry, to legislate on the hoof for the rest of us. When there is a dispute about what the law requires, it is not to be settled by mantras or even opinion polls but by the civilized process of judicial deliberation. Otherwise we slide into the hands of the lynch mob. The DCC police have recognized that it is the courts that must clarify the meaning of Government regulations if doubt exists, not the police or the public.

The word of the Saviour

In Matthew 12.42 we have those words of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning Solomon and himself. 'The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here'. These words of the Saviour remind us that we have the serious matter of ultimate justice to consider. Whatever side a person may choose to support between Cummings and his critics, each of us, whether Christian or not, will have to stand before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of his or her every word about it. I would, therefore, urge my Christian brethren in particular to ensure that what you say on this topical subject is true, correct and in accordance with the word of God. I read a fair amount of reporting on Government regulations concerning how we are to behave regarding the Corona Virus but never saw anything about the now contentious paragraph and its meaning. Consequently, I am reserving judgement on precisely what it does mean until some competent forum reviews what it does and does not include. I grant this might never be done this side of God's judgement day. I certainly did not hear any calls for judicial review from those present in the Rose Garden during the BBC broadcast. Like our Lord, a man was condemned on the basis of what those present wanted some words to mean or not mean. The seriousness of this lies, not in whether Mr Cummings remains in post but

whether individual views of 'social justice' are to take precedence over the rule of law. Sadly, our nation now prioritizes the opinions of men over the Word of God.

The way of the saved

When the disciples of the Pharisees sought to trap Christ by that question, 'Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not', he replied, 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's' (Matthew 22.21). As Christians, we recognize that God's moral law takes precedence over Caesar's laws, wherever the two disagree. For example, we cannot be faithful to Christ and endorse abortion on demand. 'Thou shalt not kill' (Exodus 20.13) has precedence over all arguments. This was not, however, the issue in the Rose Garden. Mr Cummings, the accused, was not arguing that his conduct was moral even if illegal. His argument was that his conduct was necessary and was *legal* according to the regulations. The argument of his inquisitors was that his conduct was *illegal* and not endorsed by the regulations. This is not a time for Christians to take sides for or against the accused. We should insist upon the point that, even on the assumption of guilt, the accused is entitled to a verdict in a proper form that demonstrates by judicial deliberation that the law was broken. Christians of all viewpoints ought to insist that the people's court of Demetrius (Acts 19.23-34) has no place in British Society. The method of trial in the Rose Garden would soon turn on and bite Christians and Churches. As the Almighty is a just God and Saviour it becomes Christians to disassociate from all injustice. What the law *is* must be decided in a proper legal forum, which terminates in the UK Supreme Court and, eventually, in *THE* Supreme Court for 'when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats' (Matthew 25.31-32). It will be very interesting to hear the verdict on the Rose Garden division on that day but it is even more important, through faith in Christ and the imputation of his righteousness to be on the Saviour's right hand to hear those words, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 25.34).

8. DEATH, LIFE AND CHRIST

'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 6.23).

Thinking about death

Our text begins, 'For the wages of sin is death'. When a lot of people are dying, it makes us think about death. One of our previous meditations was based upon the cry of Mary and Martha to the Saviour concerning their brother Lazarus, 'Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick' (John 11.3). Lazarus, you remember subsequently died. Many deaths result from illness, especially in pandemics. I was interested to see that John 11.3 was quoted in a letter of a teenage girl in Wuhan, China, whose younger brother

was ill with the Corona virus. The letter was published in the May/June 2020 issue of the *Hudson Taylor Ministries Magazine* by which time the whole family had been ill with the virus but thankfully all recovered. The words that struck me are as follows. 'With this virus, those things that make life more comfortable, those things that falsely arouse the desires of people, those things that elevate pride and security to people, all lose their value, and people return to their basic needs. Their total mind preoccupation is just to be able to live! But even if you live, there will come a day of death. What is more terrible than the virus? That is sin, and the wrath of God!' These are very perceptive words for a teenager and well illustrate the point that the wages of sin is death.

Thinking about life

Paul continues, 'but the gift of God is eternal life' and what a pleasing 'but' it is. It is good to get things into proportion when things are gloomy. Someone might telephone to say, 'Your house caught fire' and your heart sinks. 'But' they continue, 'the Fire Brigade arrived quickly and put out the fire and there is no damage beyond the kitchen'. How that 'but...' gets everything into proportion and shines a light in the darkness. So it is here: 'the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life'. We need to know *both* parts of Paul's doctrine. The first part is a mega problem for every single person but the second part is light in darkness for every believing sinner.

Thinking about Christ

How can Paul be so bold as to tell sinners who deserve death that there is hope? Is it not because he who was once without God, having no hope, in the world was a changed man through his encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road? It was not so much what Paul did but who Christ is that made the difference. Paul has plenty to say about faith in Romans but it is not faith 'in general' but faith 'in Christ'. Any other faith does not help because the gift of eternal life is only 'through Jesus Christ our Lord'. It is not going to help sinners for the Corona virus to set them thinking about death if they do not see that God, in his gracious, undeserved favour has provided *the* answer to death through faith in Jesus Christ. Our Prime Minister had the virus and in the mercy of God recovered but a teenager in China is way ahead of his undoubted intellectual prowess and we see that 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings' God has 'perfected praise?' (Matthew 21.16)

'Philip... arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. (Acts 8.26-28)

One message for all “races”*

On Tuesday morning the BBC was addressing racism and the lady interviewed said, "Nobody's doing anything about it". I cannot speak concerning the lady herself but this has been a repeated theme in the debate about racism. There is mass ignorance concerning the fact that Christians who follow Christ in the matter have been doing something about it since the first century. It mattered not to Philip that the Lord sent him to speak to an Ethiopian (Acts 8.27). I am sure he would be delighted to do so. Our present generation is ignorant (some willingly so) of the heartbeat of authentic Biblical Christianity that has an open door to all and a warm reception for everyone that loves the Lord Jesus, irrespective of any distinctions. Thus Paul, 'For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3.26-28).

One Messiah for all “races”*

Perhaps at times even true Christians are not everything that we should be. We are still sinners, saved by grace alone. But to those whose message concerning racism is, 'Nobody's doing anything about it', the BBC should straighten the record by reminding listeners that many churches sought to help those seeking asylum fifteen or so years ago in various positive ways. There would be plenty Africans to interview able to witness to this. Authentic Christianity ought always to be filled with a sense that the Saviour allowed no superficial differences to impede his work. When Philip approached the man of Ethiopia he found him reading Isaiah 53.7-8: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth' (Acts 8.32-33). Philip was not going to speak of Christ's substitutionary atonement as being only for Jews any more than Christians today would say it was only for Anglo Saxons. If more interviewers and interviewees attended Gospel Churches there would be a greater understanding that Jesus Christ *has* done something about uniting Jews, Anglo Saxons and Ethiopians. 'Philip... began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus' (Acts 8.35).

One multitude of all “races”*

I heard another speaker complaining about the school curriculum not doing anything about it but, the truth is, people want to tell the story their way. What is really needed is to tell the story Christ's way. School children and youths would then learn about the real impact for good of the Gospel through the eighteenth and nineteenth century evangeli-

cal missionaries and the long labours of William Wilberforce in the British Parliament for the emancipation of slaves. It is rather discouraging to find news broadcasts giving the impression that only atheistic humanism can find an answer. The answer is already with us. Two thousand years ago on the cross at Calvary, the Saviour, Jesus Christ bore the curse of the broken law to provide the complete answer founded on a common experience of forgiveness and eternal life through faith in the Son of God incarnate. We are not opposed to peaceful endeavours to improve race relations but Humanism has no *total* solution. The absolute union of hearts can only be found as a result of redemption. The Apostle John reports, 'After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb' (Revelation 7.9-10). When we see Christ for who he is, *then* we see one another for who we are and love one another as never before.

**It is the writer's view that there is but one human race and that the differences are "nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues".*

10. CHURCH ATTENDANCE

'And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching' (Hebrews 10.24-25).

Christian duty despite crisis

'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together' is a reminder that we have a responsibility of assembling for the worship of God. God's Word does not allow us to settle into a routine of 'virtual' church. On the other hand there are doubtless duties of prudence and preservation of life and striking a balance between these and our duty of assembling is not going to be easy in the context of the Corona virus. The Bible has various passages on pestilence and plagues. Such scourges have persisted into modern times and in a very short time, the Corona Virus has forced itself on the attention of the world to such an extent that governments, economies and peoples are left reeling. We previously considered the origin of plagues in the Fall of Man and the ultimate solution in the cross of Christ. Viruses belong, not to the original perfection of the world, not to the new heavens and earth to come but to our fallen world. They have the savour of death about them and carry away many to judgement and eternity.

Christian duty in our circumstances

There is an apparently easy answer regarding our duty. Guided by the Bible, as applied by the Holy Spirit, we must continue energetically in our Christian duties in so far as we can. Question 42 of *The Shorter Catechism* asks, 'What is the sum of the ten commandments?' The answer is brief but comprehensive. 'The sum of the ten command-

ments is, 'To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves.' We might think that things have worked out in this direction. Fatalities, lock-downs, reduced contact with friends and so on have made us more appreciative of our relationship to God as a loving heavenly Father and to Christ as an ever present Saviour and Lord. They have also prompted us to be watching out with respect to the needs of others and doing something about those needs. 'So far so good', we may say.

Christian duty and the Church

When we turn from the personal to the ecclesiastical things are not so plain. The Last Supper reminds us that it is the will of Christ to be among his *gathered* people. The Apostle reminds his readers that there were those who did not take this responsibility seriously and that their example was not to be followed. But in our current situation we are reminded that social distancing is necessary and that there is a high risk of the aged dying if they catch this disease. In the U.K. a high proportion of ministers are not young. At the very time that the importance of pastoral care and evangelism is staring us in the face, they have had to be curtailed. Before closure became mandatory we might have wondered, should we ignore the advice and carry on as usual trusting all to God?

(1) *The first thing we should notice in this connection is that the government regulations and advice are good. Avoiding dangers and preserving one's own life and the life of others is good. If the church building is on fire then we all head to the fire exit even if the service has to be discontinued.*

(2) *On the other side most will see that the preciousness of congregational worship is not to be dispensed with lightly. We must be thankful that we had expertise in our congregation to use Facebook to host the minister leading the Lord's Day and midweek services but we must not be content with this beyond its time of necessity. Recommencing meetings at some point should be a lot more comfortable and safe than a small group of World War II soldiers gathered around the chaplain in the trenches, with shells exploding*

(3) We have previously considered the fact that the Passover embodied both dispersal and solidarity. The participation in the Passover Lamb by those sheltering under the blood was instituted as a *communal* meal of God's people in *separated* households. Moses, Aaron and other believing Israelites enjoyed a common blessing despite being in their separate households. It is, thus, apparent that in these extraordinary times we can anticipate blessings from worship properly conducted though the worshippers are not present in the same location at the time. We are not, however, to resort to electronic substitutes beyond what is necessary. We are expressly commanded not to forsake the assembling of the saints. While continuing apart we must work to and pray for reunion as one body.

11. GOING HOME

'And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven' (2 Kings 2.11).

Going up to heaven

'Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven' without having to die. It was an enviable transition for the godly prophet exhibiting God's grace, compassion and power. The event inspires hope and encouragement in the hardest times, even if we do not expect a literal repeat of his translation in our own case. The song, *'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot'* written by Wallis Willis which became the signature tune of *Twickenham Rugby Club* has hit the headlines as a result of claims that it should be banned because of its association with the slave trade. The song itself is apparently based upon Elijah's being taken into heaven, whether in the chariot or by the whirlwind alone is a matter of debate. The song takes it in the former sense as shown by the following verses.

'Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home

If you get there before I do
(Coming for to carry me home)
Tell all of my friends, that I'm coming there too
(Coming for to carry me home)

I knew the song well and sang along on Church bus trips in my unconverted youth. The slave trade times of Wallis Willis were the *cause* of his writing the song but the *content* has to do with the Christian hope that rises above man's inhumanity to man and looks to a perfect and heavenly home, not here, but above, where God is and where the crucified and resurrected Saviour, Jesus Christ has gone before. The song is about a final rest that sinful man cannot trouble by his injustices. Its theme of victory over human wrongs and even death itself was so distasteful to the Nazis that they had it on their hit-list of of unsuitable literature that was 'undesired and harmful'!

Now in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity we are expected to endorse the prescription. That really is philosophy on the hoof. One of Francis Schaeffer's books on modern philosophy is called, *Escape from reason*. He concludes that our modern philosophies are not taking us anywhere good but into darkness and confusion. For some modern rationalists 'the ultimate in autonomous freedom is being crazy. It is a fine thing to be crazy, for then you are free' (IVP. p.70).

Being ready to go

Elijah was separated from Elisha and taken from earth to heaven 'as they still went on, and talked'. We cannot mistake the lesson of 'being ready to go'. Earlier, Elijah had wanted to go and prayed to go. 'He requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers' (1 Kings 19.4). But there was still work to do then.

By the time of the circumstances of 2 Kings 2, Elijah has a worthy successor in Elisha and can go to his eternal rest. The timing for exits from the stage of life, as Shakespeare put it, is not in our hands. The 'chariot' will not come at our beck and call but when God sends it. We may look over Jordan with *expectation* but not *exasperation* as though the bus or chariot is late. Howsoever and whensoever the chariot of eternal life in physical death should come, we, through faith in Christ should be ready. 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them' (Revelation 14.13b). Is it really sound logic to proscribe words that are so full of hope, even in the face of death, because they were written in an age of faults? On that basis we would have to ban the whole Bible, which some would like to do. I recall how our adopted Christian grandma, as she got older, spoke more and more of going 'home'. To those who want to rob us of hope, I say, her words sounded a lot more pleasant than, "When you're dead you're dead". But, now we live in an age of *Escape from Reason*.

Not a final parting

'There appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder' but Elisha would expect to walk with Elijah again. 'Tell all my friends, that I'm coming there too' involves the expectation 'to be with Christ; which is far better' (Philippians 1.23b) than anything we have known here. If hope, assurance, reunion and blessedness are become objectionable because the writer lived at a time of objectionable views, though not holding to them himself, we would have to dispose of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Escape from reason indeed!

12. ASSEMBLING

'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching' (Hebrews 10.25).

Our duty to God

According to Scripture, the 'assembling of ourselves together' and 'not forsaking' such assemblies are matters of obedience to God. The Greek word translated 'assembling together' is also used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, 'Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled...' (verses 1-2a). The Jamieson, Fausset and

Brown commentary makes the point that 'The assembling of ourselves for Christian communion is an earnest of our being gathered together to Him at His appearing'. It also adds that 'Union is strength; continual assemblies beget and foster *love*, and give opportunities for 'provoking to good works,' by "exhorting one another".'* Congregational gatherings are thus at the heart of Christian profession promoting not only our witness to those that are without but also the glory of God and increase of the fellowship of the saints, our hope, joy, love, and good works. Such gatherings also involve our duty to our Christian brothers and sisters.

Our duty to fellow believers

My generation has learned the hard way that, if we lose sight of *why* we are gathering, decline can be both rapid and extensive. Pastor F. J. Harris, now with the Christ he faithfully preached, points out that the seeds of our deteriorated Evangelicalism were present in 1950, when he was converted. Evangelicalism was much stronger then but he lists seven weaknesses. His first is as follows, 'Most of the preaching, though broadly Biblical, tended towards Arminianism and the ministry was largely evangelistic or devotional. But the whole counsel of God was not preached; there was not a strong doctrinal emphasis. Expository preaching was virtually unknown and consequently believers were ill-equipped to face the dangers and errors that were very soon to appear'*** Three necessities for Christian communal life are as follows.

(1) *Christian truth*. There must be a return to a conscious preservation of Reformation commitments. The Reformed Confessional standards are reliable guides to Biblical interpretation in order to doctrinal preservation, resistance to error and the identification of antichristian and heretical teaching.

(2) *Christian community*. Assembling together around the Word of God fosters the preservation of Christian fellowship, worship, discipline and Biblical church order.

(3) *Christian service*. Mutual encouragement fosters Christian action. 'Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works' (Hebrew 10.24).

Our duty to our neighbour

The mission of the Church extends beyond itself. The apostle makes reference to 'the day approaching'. Time is running out for the ungodly. Christians must not adopt the Cainite philosophy of life, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' as though we have no responsibility for our neighbour's welfare. Cain's reply to God's question, 'Where is Abel thy brother?' was "I know not". It was an evident evasion of personal responsibility. He knew perfectly well where his victim's corpse lay. Finding ourselves, like Ezekiel, in a valley of dry bones, there is plenty for us to do. The fact that the rider on the pale horse (Revelation 6.8) has had such a field day with Covid-19 adds urgency to our mission but the very same virus has, and is, limiting our response. Balancing staying safe and saving lives with saving souls while being identified as age 'vulnerable' is challenging to say the least! Does one take more risks and end out of action altogether or does one minimize

risks to maintain one's existing contribution? How do we balance Divine provision and protection and personal responsibility? These are not easy days to answer such questions and to 'hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering' (Hebrews 10.23).

* Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments, Volume Three (Hendrickson, p.563)*.

** *Whatever Happened to the Old Evangelicalism*, page 4.

13. Corona Chat!

'I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away' (1 Kings 19.14).

New experiences introduce us to new expressions.

Lockdown

The word 'lockdown' is used in a prison context when prisoners are confined to their cells. It is also used for an 'emergency measure' implemented temporarily to prevent movements in or out of a dangerous area. In connection with the Coronavirus it is used for a period during which residents are confined to their homes except for shopping expeditions or outdoor exercise. We could describe Elijah as being in lockdown in his cave at this point in his ministry. The wicked queen Jezebel had threatened to kill him and his voluntary lockdown in the cave seemed to be a sensible course. From the angle of self-preservation, we would scarcely quarrel with that. It was not, however, God's place for him any longer. There was further kingdom work to be done and Elijah must be on the move. We have a fellow-feeling in this connection. We find a tension between personal welfare and kingdom labours. Many *have* died and we have empirical proof that the coronavirus *is* deadly. We certainly do not have the specific guidance of the audible voice of the Lord to direct us. Once God had given Elijah his new commission, inaction on Elijah's part could only be disobedience. He *knew* God's will. Regarding our eased lockdown, we must strike a balance between the reckless abandon that we have seen in recent crowds out demonstrating and failure in our mission of praise and evangelism through lack of faith. The words of Elijah in our text were his response to Jehovah's question, 'What doest thou here, Elijah? We can see his point when he answers that he has been zealous for the Lord's cause in a wayward nation intent upon his extinction but now he *knows* he *must* be on his way, perfectly safe when underneath are the everlasting arms. Our case is not exactly the same.

Asymptomatic

The lockdown and its easing have introduced us to new words and concepts. 'Asymptomatic' means that a person is showing no evidences of the disease but that does not mean they have not got the disease. This concept helps us realize that the threat of the Coronavirus is not all one way. In congregating, it is not just that I or you may *catch* the virus and be ill, or be very ill, or die; it is also that we might be unaware that we are a carrier of the disease and *pass it on* to someone else, who is then very ill or dies. I know that this could sound alarmist, except that, if you have listened at all to our national Chief Medical Officer, you will know that he remains deeply concerned about *any* laxity in social distancing. We all have to readjust to a new normal in congregational worship and I am not disturbed that we are somewhat behind the curve, for proper reasons, in reopening our building. It is time that each of us need, whether adults or children, to adjust to the fact that we cannot just return to our normal ways of movement, interacting and worship. Each of us, adults and children, will need a new discipline to keep our two metre distance or one metre distance plus mask and 'save lives'. It is a matter of concern for ourselves and one another that *God* expects of us. Elijah could not just go back to life as usual. Ahab and Jezebel were still around and as deadly as ever as would soon be seen in Jezebel's engineering of the judicial system to murder Naboth for his vineyard. What commission Elijah would receive to Ahab in consequence! 'And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine' (I Kings 21.19). You see how precious one saint out of a whole nation is in the sight of God. *Each* believer that comes to the Bible Centre, is just as precious in God's sight, so we have an immense duty of care to one another. 'Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints' (Psalm 116.15).

Coronavirus

'Coronavirus' can be simply defined as 'an RNA-containing spherical virus' (RNA stands for 'ribonucleic acid', which acts as a messenger to carry instructions from our DNA). 'Corona' is Latin for a 'crown' and, in astronomy, is used for the halo around the moon or other heavenly bodies. There is a message of hope in this. Every time we speak, hear or read of the deadly *Corona*-virus which is causing our nation so much danger and harm we are reminded that it has a shape which reminds us of a crown or halo. This association brings before us Christ *the King* who is in absolute control and has all in hand. John reports, 'And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God' (Revelation 19.11-13). Elijah, you will recall, did not die but was taken up alive into heaven. He had one further appointment on earth. Almost one thousand years later he would meet with Moses, Peter, James and John in the presence of the transfigured Jesus whose face shone 'as the sun' (Matthew 17.2). I am sure he would have been so glad to be present, even though he had to leave heaven to be back on earth. I am sure he would not have missed it for

the world. The cave must have seemed very far away when he had *this* 'mountain top' experience. So let us keep all in proportion, work through the detail and get Christ glorified *His* way.

This booklet is a compilation of Email meditations issued weekly by Pastor Roy Mohon during the Spring and early Summer of the year 2020, during much of which time the entire country was in lockdown in consequence of the Corona Virus pandemic. Rev. Mohon was ministering during this time for the Presbyterian Reformed Church, Stockton-on-Tees by services delivered on facebook.com/prcstockton and he provided these meditations on a Thursday each week as a bridge between the Tuesday evening midweek and the following Lord's Day. Details of the Church are as follows.

PRESBYTERIAN REFORMED CHURCH
Frederick Street
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 2BF

SERVICES

Lord's Day 10:30 p.m. & 6.00 p.m.

Tuesday evening Midweek 7:30 p.m.

(Service duration is approximately 1½ hours)

During pandemic contact 01642-780002 to confirm