

Discipleship – Spring 2012 – Week beginning 14th May

Home group / study notes: Bringing good news

Feel free to use as much or as little as you wish. Don't rush the discussions in order to 'finish' the study, and make sure you allow time for the prayer.

A bit of background:

Read Ezek 40:1-4 The beginning of Ezekiel's vision of the new Temple. Then just **scan the headings** in chapters 40-43. You'll get the idea of what it is about. Chapters 44-46 then refer to the reformed priesthood, sacrifices and festivals as laid down in the Torah (*Genesis to Deuteronomy*).

The heart of the OT sacrificial system lies in the fact that God is entirely pure and holy, while human nature is fallen. Nothing impure ('unclean') can ever be in the presence of God, or it will be destroyed – hence Isaiah's fear in Is 6:5-6. The 'unclean' can only be made 'clean' by sacrifice and the life-blood being offered back to God. In the Old Covenant God provided the means through animal sacrifice, in place of the death of the sinful person. 'You obey and do what I have said, and I will bless'.

Read Ezek 47:1-6 'Son of man, do you see this?' What do you think Ezekiel was meant to be 'seeing'? How do you relate this to the New Covenant – what is the AD equivalent of the Temple? Read John 7:37-39. What about sacrifice? Read Heb 7:27. Where are you in the river... up to the ankles, or allowing the Holy Spirit to sweep you off your feet and dictate where you will end up?

Read Ezek 47:6-10 Where does the water end up and what does it *do* there? What happens along the banks on the way? What does this say about our main focus as a church? Have a brainstorm about the ways in which we can enable fertile growth; how the real needs of people can be met. What can God provide through us that people can feast on? What can be transformed, from death to life?

But there is more... **Read** Ezek 47:11. What about the parts not caught up in the river, the swamps and marshes along the way? Who or what are they in Taunton? Are they to be left out of the blessing altogether?

*There is something here about the churches being a blessing to the town / communities as well as to individuals who come to faith. This has been an increasingly persistent theme running through the Taunton churches and what we believe God has been saying to us. See **overleaf** for some prophetic messages brought in 2007 and 2008 to B1 leaders. Many things are coming about in the town through or with the blessing of churches working together, but only as they and individuals listen to and follow God's Holy Spirit.*

How can we talk these things up, when people hear negative things about 'the church'? Are there (new?) things God might want *you* to be looking at?

Read Ezek 47:12 to lead into: **Prayer** for our outreach from St James'. For Street Pastors, Town Chaplaincy, Open Door, foodbank, possible debt advice centre, TYFC, school governors. What is our part to play in God's plans at the moment? Spend some time quietly listening to God; ask for any pictures or words he might want to give and don't be afraid to share them, however irrelevant they may seem – some may indeed be what God needs someone else, or all of us, to hear. If there are things that might be for the whole church, let Tim know. Many people thought Ezekiel was mad!

NB None of the projects above has a written statement of belief! Is doctrinal agreement the basis for work between churches, or by which to define ourselves? (Answers on a postcard, please...)

Read Rev 22:1-3 Where will the river eventually reach? What are we building as we go out in service? Where is the 'tree of life' first mentioned in the Bible? What might that tell us about an even bigger picture – the healing of creation?

[Further study – see how God challenged Peter then the Jewish apostles when Peter took the good news in Acts 10-11. Last week, a black eunuch... this week *gentiles!!* Any more thoughts following on from last week, about how St James' would rise to possible challenges to our comfort zones?]

Praying, interceding and waiting on God

A key part of relationship building and seeking the heart of God for the B1 leaders has been spending 24 hours away together on occasions. During one of these times, in May 2007, we heard from Howard Chiplin, a pastor and prophet from Northumbria whom Tim knew as a minister in Hereford:

I believe God says, the reason that I have caused you to come together at this time is that I might move in Taunton, and make Taunton a place where, in the whole of the South-West, churches and Christian communities will understand that this is a place where God is moving, this is a place where God is honoured.

And although there have been times when you have despaired of the environment and the society in which your town is involved, I will declare to you right now that as you men continue to pray, and as you wait before me and as you intercede and spend time in your meetings together without talking, just waiting on God and allowing my Spirit to move, I will begin to do things in this town and to be an example to other towns in this part of the country.

And out of this town in years to come, there will proceed a team of young men and young women who will go into other villages and towns taking the Gospel. And they will be the cause of a reviving of spiritual enthusiasm among those that are young in age.

A 'Ground Level' leader, Graham Bell also believed he had something for us in 2007 or 2008:

I believe even now, God is giving you a strategy for building His church. There is the potential for powerful prophetic insight to come as you gather; you will hear God's voice when leaders gather and when church gathers, particularly as you ask Him to speak. This will not be easy, but don't hold back. As you move forward into change, it will feel fragile, it will feel out of control. Indeed, some will long for the security of familiarity, but press through with Jesus and allow His shaping to emerge.

You have something for your wider area - it is as though a new well is opened and an old well is unstopped. So you come into the good of prayers prayed a century ago. You come into the good of prayers prayed two centuries ago, but there is also a new thing that comes out of the prayers of this time, this age, this leadership.

There is coming an evangelistic dimension. It is actually to be carried by the evident presence of God. It is not according to any established pattern or protocol, it is not out of the big event or organised effort, but the very evident presence, love and power of God will draw others to Himself

As we can see, the Lord has brought us a long way, and yet the best is still to come. The challenge now is for each one of us to take hold of these words, let them shape us and pray until we see them accomplished.