

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 3rd Jan 2010

Past Imperfect Future Tense!

Jeremiah 29:11-13, Matt 28:16 -20, Rev 1:1-8



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

The first week of January is a great week to look ahead and make a promise or resolution for the year that beckons. At the heart of the definition of 'resolution' lies fixed purpose, determination, constancy, and at the heart of 'promise' is fulfilment, engagement, expectation, hope for the future. Every year in January we make promises and resolutions only to see them crumble away when February beckons! Only 6% of all people keep their New Year's Resolution! Such is human nature but what of God and his promises? The Bible is full of them – from the promise to Abraham of a son (Gen 21:1-2), and a promised land to his descendants (Ex 3:16 -18), to the promise given by Christ to his disciples that they would be filled with the Spirit of God (Luke 24:49). If God is consistent with his own nature as being all loving and all powerful then the promises he makes must have resolution, determination and constancy, they must give grounds for a firm hope for the future, of fulfilment and expectation.

At the beginning of a New Year let's focus on three particular passages from the OT, a Gospel and a NT letter that speak to us today of God's promise to his people:

1. Jeremiah 29:10 – 14. Written in the 6th century BC the prophet Jeremiah takes us to Babylon where he tells God's people that there is no use crying over spilt milk and the disaster of their exile but rather to learn to see their situation not as tragic or evil but as part of God's good purpose for them and his promises of a new hope filled future. Return from exile is promised in 70 years but before the people of God could ever enter into this promise there needs to be a radical change of heart (v13). From Temple worship in Jerusalem and praying for themselves and Israel and vengeance for their enemies they were now being called to pray for their enemies (v7)! Despite having lost everything they considered essential to their faith they had in fact lost nothing! Jeremiah insists that the exiles can and must find God in Babylon. In Babylon God was setting them free from the confines of Jerusalem and could now be rediscovered in what had previously been regarded as cold tragic even God forsaken places. For some of us today the promise of v 11 resonates loud and clear but if so it needs to do so in the context of a call to trust God in the midst of finding ourselves in places or circumstances that would not be of our choosing – unexpected situations which call us to "seek him with all our heart" and discover afresh his plans and purposes.

2. Matthew 28:16 -20. Matthew takes us to Galilee to Jesus' final resurrection appearance to his disciples and his great commission to them. Amidst their fear and trembling, anxiety, uncertainty, doubt, faith, worship and joy Jesus makes an incredible promise "surely I am with you to the very end of the age" (v 20). The birth of Christ – Emmanuel – God with us 1:23) is echoed here by the words of Christ himself - the one who was born for us, died for us, rose again for us says "I am still with you!" Just as a few years earlier he had taught his disciples "where two or three of you gather together in my name then I am with you" so now he promises that he will always be with them till the very end of the age. That is a wonderful promise for us, the power and presence of Christ but as with Jeremiah it surely also challenges our faith as the promise of his presence is inextricably linked to his command to go, make disciples!

3 Rev 1: 1-18 And so to Patmos and John's revelations. Over the next few weeks we will be beginning a major six month theme of Bible teaching on the book of Revelation. It is a book that will challenge us as it paints a picture of things to come and a better world. It will demand of us an engagement with the realities of the struggle between good and evil, not just for the future but in the present. It will arouse in us a dissatisfaction with the status quo and a hunger and thirst for the coming of God's kingdom in the here and now. As prophetic vision it will call us from the imperfect past into the tension of the now and the not yet future. In Chapter 1 we have this promise, this prophetic pronouncement which telegraphs a key to the overall content of Revelation – read v 7 and 8. Christ will come again and in contrast to the first coming it will not be in obscurity but will be apparent to all (7 and 8 are a fusion of Daniel 7:13 and Zech 12:10). Even those who were the enemies of Christ "those who pierced him" will see him. Here at the beginning of Rev John affirms that at the centre of the events of world history stands Christ and his victory over death on the cross – read v8.

God's purposes for his creation, for each one of us are unfolding "for I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." His Son has promised to be with us always "to the very end of the age." His promises are fixed, determined, resolute, for he is "the Alpha and Omega...the one who is, who was and who is to come." As we embrace 2010 may we embrace both the comfort and the challenge of what it means to be God's people of hope for the future, God's people of promise.



Witness: questions to discuss Before discussion, read the Bible passage and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Consider one or two questions below – don't feel you have to use them all but do consider the key question! Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer and ministry.

- 1 Have you made a resolution this year? Can you remember last year's resolution? How long did you keep it?
- 2 What promise would you like to make to God this year?
- 3 Have you had an experience of a promise that God has made to you that you can share with the group?
- 4 Have you ever found yourself in a cold tragic or 'God forsaken' place only to discover God?
- 5 Jesus promises he will always be with his disciples till the very end of the age. That is a wonderful promise for us, the power and presence of Christ but it surely also challenges our faith as the promise of his presence is inextricably linked to his command to go, make disciples! In what way in 2010 can we at St Paul's 'go make disciples'...fulfil the Great Commission?