

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 6th December 2009

## Christmas Presence – Deliverance

### Jeremiah 33:14 -16; 1 Thess. 3: 9-13 and Luke 21:25-36

#### Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

The season of Advent is a time when we can prepare ourselves to meet Jesus afresh as we reflect on his coming to earth and his eventual return in Glory. The son of man brings freedom, deliverance and the fullness of His presence. Christmas presence; not Christmas presents of the wrapped in shiny paper variety, but the presence of Christ with us and in us.

Each of our 3 readings brings a different facet of God's deliverance and hope for the world. Jeremiah writes about the coming of a deliverer; of the fulfillment of a gracious promise. St Luke speaks of the Son of Man coming to deliver his people and bringing in the kingdom of God and urges people to look for the signs of His coming again. Luke's message is one of hope. Our reading from St Paul's letter to the Thessalonians looks forward to the second coming of Jesus, when our deliverance shall be complete.

**Jeremiah's** (33:14–16) prophecy is not just the prediction about a future event that for us now is long past. It proclaims to each one of us something about the very nature of God - his overwhelming love and faithfulness and his ultimate desire to bring forth a deliverance that would set people free. We should be very cautious that we do not too easily predict what kind of future the world can expect. But there should be no hesitancy in proclaiming that with God, there is always a future! This passage not only calls us to reflect on the faithfulness of God as He worked in Israel's history, especially as that faithfulness worked out in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but it also calls us to hold the present realities of life within the cradle of expectation.

**Luke 21: 25-36.** What does it mean when Jesus says to us that there is a day coming when the Son of Man will come to us in a cloud with power and great glory? What it does mean, right here and now, is that nothing is outside of his authority. Because in Jesus' own words *'When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'* In the midst of pain and suffering there is one who is alongside bringing hope when previously there was only darkness. When someone we love dies the thing we miss the most is their presence. What we need to be praying for at this time is more of the tangible presence of Christ with those whom we pray for. Prayer is our most valuable commodity and we forsake it at our peril. Prayer is able to save lives in more ways than one. All 3 readings reveal even greater hope that the promise of God - the promise of Christ - is that the future is not going to be like the present. It's that those things that we see that are wrong in this world, those things that we hear of that are evil – will perish away, and that a new heaven and a new earth will come upon us – a heaven and earth of everlasting peace and justice, joy and love. There is deliverance yet to come. The kingdom is coming. A righteous branch has sprouted from David's line; and he will do what is just and right in the land. He has come - and he is returning. We are called to be ready for him when he does, to be praying, to be loving one another and doing the things he has commanded us to do. Jesus does not tell us about the signs of the end and the coming time of judgement to frighten us, but rather to assure us - to have us understand that God is keeping his promise - and that the time of his rule is at hand. He tells us about the signs of the coming of the kingdom so that we might ready ourselves for it.

**1 Thess. 3: 9-13** calls us to look around, and walk the road towards the approaching Kingdom in prayer and with hope, in righteousness and in love, knowing that as so many of the promises of God were fulfilled at the birth of Christ, so too the rest will be fulfilled at his coming again. In the words of St Paul: <sup>12</sup>*May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.* <sup>13</sup>*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*

#### Witness: questions to discuss

Before discussion, read the Bible passages 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. Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer and ministry.

1. What do these promises about the future mean when we are caught up in trying to do all we can do right here and now in the present?
2. Read Luke 21:32 and 33 what do you think Jesus meant by this?
3. How do we live day to day, practicing the presence of Christ?
4. Have you ever imagined what it will be like to stand before Him when he comes again? Spend sometime time praying for one another as you ponder this question.
5. St Paul prays that we will be holy and blameless, but so often we are not. What do we need to do, if anything, to be like this when he comes again?
6. Time and distance from the world of the New Testament can make it difficult to relate to the future coming of Christ. How do you reconcile the modern world with the picture Jesus paints for us?