****

**Sunday 15 August 2021 to Sunday 22 August 2021**

****

Sunday 15 August 2021

# The present life

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day (John 6:54).**

Read John 6:51–58

Do you live in the present? Or perhaps you long for the past – the good old days? Or do you have hopes for the future? Each could be said to be important in its own way.

I am fascinated by the use of the present tense in Jesus’ words in the Gospel of John. John 6:54 is but one example of numerous times Jesus says, ‘you have eternal life’. Often, beliefs or actions are attached to his statement. But it is constantly a real thing, a present action, something people can grab hold of. We have often tended to talk about the future hope or the reign of the kingdom to come. But Jesus here seems to be saying something different.

There is also the use of the words ‘I am …’ by Jesus in this gospel. You are probably familiar with them. I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the vine, the way, truth and life and in John 6:51, I am the living bread.

It seems to me Jesus is making a point. Faith, grace and living with Christ is not something in the future alone. It is not pie in the sky but a living reality. Even Paul picks this up when he says, ‘for me to live is Christ’.

Enjoy your memories – they are important to who you are. Look with confidence and hope to the future – there are bright times ahead. But live in the present grace of God, spoken to you and demonstrated for you in the person of Jesus and refreshed in you daily by the Holy Spirit. Believe in Christ. Enjoy life!

**Lord Jesus, we worry about things we have done in the past; we get anxious about the future. Reassure us, Jesus, with your words of grace: ‘you have eternal life’. Amen.**

Monday 16 August 2021

# Wisdom and understanding

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Listen carefully to wisdom; set your mind on understanding (Proverbs 2:2).**

Read Proverbs 2:1–15

For the next few days, the readings are about wisdom and understanding. Where do you get your wisdom from? What gives you understanding?

Many might say most wisdom comes from the Bible. Others would suggest it comes from someone experienced in life – perhaps an older friend. Although, the younger ones among us have their fair share of wisdom too. Some would say it comes from a wide range of reading. Others might suggest it comes from times of silence and meditation.

It is fair to say there are many sources of wisdom. And that’s fair enough. If God made all things, perhaps wisdom resides in all things. If Christ was involved in creating all things (Colossians 1:16), then the idea of wisdom can be explored through any and all things!

But Paul also says Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). So it would be wise to make Christ our starting point when searching for wisdom and understanding. Living in Christ’s grace and blessing; caring for the poor; seeking justice; practising compassion; walking daily with Jesus. If we aim for these things, wisdom and understanding may just happen to occur naturally, as part of our everyday life in and with Christ.

I’m not going to stop reading the Bible. More widely, I’m not going to stop listening to others who have more experience than me in all sorts of areas. I’m not going to stop seeing God in creation and being pleasantly surprised by the Spirit’s revelation of understanding in nature.

I will aim to have Christ as the starting point; to attempt to love and live as he did; to welcome God’s presence in all I do and see and read. I am going to embrace the Holy Spirit’s stirring in my experiences of life. And I am going to live immersed in grace. Perhaps as I do that, some wisdom may just appear in my words and actions.

**Christ, the wisdom of God, giver of all good gifts, fill my life with your love, wisdom and understanding. Amen.**

Tuesday 17 August 2021

# Give me wisdom, or give me …

by Pastor Peter Bean

**For wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her (Proverbs 8:11).**

Read Proverbs 8:11–22

Wisdom is more precious than rubies. Nothing you could want is equal to it, and nothing you could desire can compare with her (wisdom).

I don’t know much about rubies. But obviously, they are precious, valuable, expensive and liked! They also seem to be held in very high esteem by the writer’s audience. The writer had also previously referred to teachings and knowledge being better than silver and gold. Perhaps the community of listeners were obsessed with assets, prosperity and riches!

Yet, it is stated clearly: wisdom is more precious. And one might presume more valuable, worth more and quite beneficial. If you read through Proverbs 8 until verse 22, you will also read that wisdom has many gifts associated with this gift itself.

Knowledge, good sense, understanding, power, wealth, justice, and even accompanying the Lord is mentioned at different times. Who wouldn’t want wisdom? And yet, some prefer rubies or silver or gold.

What do you want or desire in your life? How do these wants and desires – the goods you have, the things you own – compare with wisdom? Do any of the things you listed include the above gifts?

It’s okay to have wants and desires in our lives. None of us is immune to that way of thinking. And goods and possessions are important for our way of living and offer ways to help others.

But if we are freely offered something better, which will benefit us and all we come into contact with, is it not worth taking up that offer?

When we read verse 22 carefully, it would seem that if we practise wisdom and its associated gifts – knowledge, good sense, understanding, (beneficial) power, (shared) wealth, justice – we are walking with the Lord. We are accompanied by the Beloved every moment of our life.

**Lord of life, let me share in your wisdom, and in turn, share all your gifts with others. Amen.**

Wednesday 18 August 2021

# Enjoy the good days; value the bad ones

by Pastor Peter Bean

**When life is good, enjoy it. But when life is hard, remember: God gives good times and hard times, and no-one knows what tomorrow will bring (Ecclesiastes 7:14).**

Read Ecclesiastes 7:11–25

The Message version of Ecclesiastes 7:14 says this: ‘On a good day, enjoy yourself; on a bad day, examine your conscience. God arranges for both kinds of days so that we won’t take anything for granted’.

One person’s good day is another person’s fantastic day! One person’s hard time is another person’s tragedy. In one sense, it is like the half-full/half-empty cup dilemma. No matter what you think you have, the cup holds half liquid and half air. No matter what you think of your life, you have your life!

And, according to The Message translation: God arranges for both times. What do we make of this? What sort of God is revealed here? Perhaps we need to consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:45, ‘God makes the sun rise on the bad and on the good and causes rain to fall on the just and unjust’. The point is God practises universal, non-violent love. Through Jesus, grace, love and life are offered to all. The good and bad, the just and unjust, those who look for it and those who don’t.

I don’t know where you sit along these continuums. I do know that Jesus says, ‘Come to me, all who are thirsty’. And each one of us is thirsty at times. Different times, different situations, different responses. God’s offer, through Jesus, still stands.

And for those of us who respond to that grace, love and life, we receive blessings. And we are called to offer similar grace, love and life to others. No matter our situation, we are blessed to be a blessing.

**Thank you, Lord, for the variety of life experiences we have. Help us to hold onto your grace and love, no matter our situation. When we are able, encourage us in our endeavours to be a blessing to others. Amen.**Thursday 19 August 2021

# Wisdom or foolishness?

by Pastor Peter Bean

**The quiet words of a wise person are better than the shouts of a foolish ruler (Ecclesiastes 9:17).**

Read Ecclesiastes 9:11–18

The verse above contains almost the final words in this chapter. It is worth reading the whole passage to understand the context.

If you think through history, there have been many foolish rulers. You can make your own list. And sadly, it seems that the shouts of unwise rulers hold sway in many places today.

Let’s consider this verse and those before it in the context of Jesus. Generally speaking, it would be fair to say that Jesus spoke quiet words (although there were exceptions) and practised wisdom. Those who opposed him often seemed to shout, if not literally, then certainly in their attempts to derail his ministry.

So, what made Jesus’ actions and (quiet) words so attractive to many and yet repulsive to others? Jesus did not just accept the status quo! He stood up for and ministered to those considered slow, weak, unable to stand up for themselves, without many skills. Jesus recognised people for who they were and encouraged them to live their life to the fullest. Jesus challenged accepted ways of living. He elevated women to their rightful place. Jesus healed those who others cast aside. He ate with those considered outcasts. He put no store in reputation. He practised justice and mercy. He loved – quietly and wisely.

When I am tempted to shout at injustices in the world and rail at the foolishness of societal leaders, I try to think of Jesus and follow his example. I often fail at that. It is then that I need to pause and wait for the still, small voice, which speaks quietly and with wisdom, reminding me that I am a child of God, I am loved, and I can live life to the full with Jesus. And I am called to look at others the same.

**Jesus, speak quietly into my rowdy world; fill me with your wisdom and love. Amen.**

Friday 20 August 2021

# Generosity instead of greed

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Then Jesus said to them, ‘Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed. Life is not measured by how much one owns’ (Luke 12:15).**

Read Luke 12:13–21

We might not say we are greedy, but it seems that greed can be present in all sorts of ways.

While money or possessions may be the obvious culprits, greed can spill across into other areas. It is good to examine our conscience in all areas.

If we find we are greedy in any area, what should we do? The obvious is to confess and change our ways. But if I may be so bold, I would like to suggest that the best way to overcome greed is to be generous! In fact, be over-generous.

I might be even bolder and say that most reading this could say, ‘I have enough good things stored to last for many years’ (verse 19). (There will be exceptions; I acknowledge that. If you are struggling, seek help through financial counsellors or similar.) But the reality is, most of us have enough and more than enough.

Years ago, in a poem titled ‘Enough’, I wrote these words:

When we who have too much
Recognise enough is enough
Maybe those who have too little
Will edge closer
Towards our enough.

Our generosity enables others to live. It expands our hearts. It responds to the generous and loving God revealed throughout Scripture. By being generous, we live in the image of God. By being generous, we have life. We can enjoy it abundantly and enable others to have life (in what to them is probably abundance).

The antidote to greed, excessive wealth and too many possessions is living in the grace of our generous God and sharing that grace in whatever way we can.

**Generous One, I thank you for all you give me. Help me to reflect your generous heart in all I do and have. Amen.**

Saturday 21 August 2021

# Jesus is present, no matter your situation

by Pastor Peter Bean

**The Lord is close to the broken-hearted, and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed (Psalm 34:18).**

Read Psalm 34:15–20

What beautiful words! I am fortunate that I have had a reasonably good life. While I have experienced disappointments, and things have not always gone the way I have planned, I don’t think I can say I have been broken-hearted or my spirit has been crushed.

At the same time, when disappointments have occurred, and when I haven’t been sure where the road is leading, the ever-present love and compassion of the Lord have been my rock and refuge! This presence has reassured and comforted me. This presence has been close and rescued (saved) me.

What about you? As you consider your life, has yours been reasonably good (however you interpret that!)? Or perhaps you have suffered more than most; you have been broken-hearted, rejected, at the end of your wits; or your spirit has been crushed. If that is the case, I hope these words in the psalm reassure you. The Lord is close to you; the Lord saves you!

These words of comfort are reflected in the life of Jesus. In the very fact that God became human and moved into the neighbourhood (John 1:14, The Message). Jesus comforted those in need. He healed those who could not find healing and welcomed those who society shunned. Jesus spoke a word of forgiveness, restoration and life to them each time.

Jesus lives the life of the broken-hearted. The Holy Spirit is with those who have been crushed. He tends their wounds, fans the weak flame and brings life to those who cannot see life ahead.

If you are broken-hearted and your spirit is crushed, turn to the one who comforts and reassures you. Know that the Lord is your rock and your refuge (Psalm 18:2).

**Lord Jesus, thank you that you come alongside us and accept and understand our concerns, worries and despair. Restore us through your presence, grace and compassion. Amen.**

Sunday 22 August 2021

# To whom shall we go?

by Marlene Cooper

**Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’ (John 6:68).**

Read John 6:56–69

What makes a teaching hard? Can’t understand it? Too deep? Outside my experience? Don’t trust the teacher? Some or all of the above could definitely prevent my fruitful learning.

Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue drew the attention of a crowd of would-be disciples, but in the end, many couldn’t accept the lesson. It was just too hard. They left him, shaking their heads, grumbling, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ (verse 52). Jesus’ claim to be the ‘living bread come down from heaven to give life to the world’ (verse 51) was difficult, but when he told them that for eternal life, they must eat his flesh and drink his blood, that was too much!

Even his own disciples were taken aback. Yes, our ancestors ate the manna in the desert, and yes, they died.  But now, you tell us you are the living bread from heaven, and we must eat you to live forever? You say that’s the real food, the real drink? Without it, we have no life in us? Try as they might, they couldn’t fathom it.

Jesus knew their hearts. ‘My words are life-giving, of the Spirit’, he told them. ‘It’s not by intellectual effort that the truth is revealed to you’. Watching those leaving, he turned to the disciples. ‘Will you be going away as well?’ With faith overcoming uncertainty, Peter declared, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!’

By staying and trusting, especially when our Lord’s teaching seems unclear and even hard, we allow the Spirit of Life to reveal the truth of Jesus to us. We take the Lord’s Supper together, feeding on his body and blood in the bread and wine, receiving all the blessings he has won for us. In his living presence, we are nourished by the real food and drink we need. We find him to be indeed the Bread of Life, broken for this hungry and thirsty world in which we live. Staying, listening, following and trusting, we too can have the assurance that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.

**Stay with us, Lord Jesus, Living Bread. You have the words and the power to make us truly alive as we feed on you, nourished for service in your kingdom, Amen.**