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**Sunday 14 November 2021 to Sunday 21 November 2021**

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Sunday 14 November 2021

# Structures or relationships?

by Pastor Peter Bean

**As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his followers said to him, ‘Look, Teacher! How beautiful the buildings are!’ (Mark 13:1).**

Read Mark 13:1–8

Perhaps you have visited some of the cathedrals of Europe, or possibly, like me, each year watching the Tour De France, you become mesmerised by the ancient monasteries, basilicas and churches. They are indeed beautiful. The stonework is often amazing. I usually wonder how they managed to construct these buildings without modern equipment. Marvels of the modern world!

This follower obviously thought the same of the temple in Jesus’ time. And perhaps rightly so. The temple was, after all, where God resided and where the high priest encountered him. Why would it not consist of beautiful buildings?

Yet Jesus was not interested in or impressed by this sort of beauty. He focused on the beauty inside a person. Jesus was not interested in God being confined to a particular place. In fact, as The Message version of John 1:14 puts it, God has moved into the neighbourhood! That’s Jesus. His focus is on people, on relationships.

Buildings have their place and serve their purpose. If they reflect the glory of God in their design and structure, that is even better. But they will rot; they will eventually fall down or be replaced.

Jesus’ relationship with us is constant; it is secure. We could even say it is beautiful. Jesus’ love for us will continue no matter what wars, earthquakes or famines come. Our reality is to walk and live in that relationship; allow the love of Jesus to permeate our lives; live in the gifts of grace and forgiveness; and gain our security from a God who became a human being in Jesus Christ, who lives in and with us wherever we are.

Value your churches; admire the cathedrals; praise God for the human effort that went into glorifying God in these buildings, but above all that, value the presence of Jesus in your heart. Allow the Holy Spirit to enable you to see God’s beauty everywhere.

**Thank you, God, for the gift of beauty. Thank you for loving us, for gifting us grace and forgiveness. Help us to live as your people wherever we may be. Amen.**

Monday 15 November 2021

# All things new

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Look, I will make new heavens and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17).**

Read Isaiah 65:17–25

This verse, repeated in Revelation 21, is one of my favourites in the Bible. Not because of the future happiness it seems to offer – some would say pie-in-the-sky – but because it is grounded in the everyday reality of God becoming human in Jesus.

Yes, there are wonderful pictures of hope in these verses: my people will be happy forever (verse 18); never again … the sound of crying or sadness (verse 19); wolves and lambs will eat together in peace (verse 25). These point to a time of perfect bliss, joy beyond imagination and blessings to all people. Something to look forward to.

But again, I am drawn to Jesus: Come to me … you who are tired ... I will give you rest (Matthew 10:28); I am the bread that gives life (John 6:35); I come to give life; life in all its fullness (John 10:10). And I could list many other verses where Jesus makes it clear: if you believe in me, you have life now.

You see, in Jesus, all things became new. The law was fulfilled. New hearts and lives were fashioned; people were new. Creation was restored. Jesus’ present reality, with the women and men who were his disciples, and all his followers, transfers to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. ‘When I go away, I will send the Helper [the Holy Spirit] to you’ (John 16:7).

We can look forward to perfect harmony: to love and joy and peace beyond measure. But we can also live with the presence of Jesus in us today. Go for a walk with your eyes newly opened. Look at the world, your neighbours, the birds and the flowers through a new lens. See God active in creation and in people. See Jesus before your eyes. And experience new life today.

**We thank you, God, for the wonderful promises you provide for us. But even more, we thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, coming into our world and making all things new. Help us to live and celebrate this newness in our lives. Amen.**

Tuesday 16 November 2021

# Jesus provides courage and hope

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Look! There is the Christ! (Matthew 24:23a)**

Read Matthew 24:15–28

I guess some who read this passage would say: yep, the end times are here! Wars! More violent storms! Earthquakes occur regularly! COVID continues to wreak havoc. Repent and be saved!

Except, that is not what this passage is talking about. It can only be understood (and through a lens darkly!) when read in context – that is, the whole chapter (if not the preceding and following chapters).

Basically, the beginning of chapter 24 is similar to the Mark passage from Sunday. Jesus talks about the temple being destroyed. Then he reassures us in verse 14 that the good news will be preached in all the world, to every nation. If we then jump to verse 36, Jesus says, ‘No-one knows the day or time. Only the Father’.

So, basically, wars, earthquakes, cyclones and COVID are all distractions, inviting us to take our eyes off Jesus and get caught up in (conspiracy) theories rather than focusing on the good news. Namely, Jesus died and rose again for us, God is in control, and we can trust in the Holy Spirit to enable and encourage us.

Even if we feel paralysed by all that is happening in the world at the moment, Jesus calls us out of that paralysis: to life, to see the Christ and to live in peace. In John 16:33, Jesus says, ‘I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world, you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world’.

Would you rather live in fear and uncertainty, with confusion and hopelessness, or is it wiser and gentler to look at Christ, allow his peace, grace and forgiveness to accompany your doubts and hand them over to him?

Jesus provides courage and hope in troubling times. Trust in him.

**We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have conquered the world. Help us rest in that knowledge, relax into your arms and be reassured by your loving embrace. Amen.**

Wednesday 17 November 2021

# Relationships are the key!

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Whoever confesses the Son has the Father too (1 John 2:23b).**

Read 1 John 2:18–23

If you have been reading the passages this week, you may well be on your way to being convinced these are the last days! But remember, these writers were saying this 2,000 years ago. If ‘these are the last days’ (verse 18) 2000 years ago, and the world hasn’t ended yet, when will it end? Can we know?

It seems to me that even though Jesus himself talks about the last days, he always brings it back to something – or someone – more important. That something today is relationship.

We confess Jesus as the Son of God, our Lord, our personal Saviour and the Saviour of the world. It is important to remember what the writer of this epistle tells us: whoever confesses the Son has the Father too.

The Son is in relationship with the Father: obvious, yet not so obvious. Sometimes we focus on one person of the Triune God. This will reflect our personal experience and preference. It might be Jesus; some prefer to begin prayers with the phrase Father God; others like to focus on the work of the Holy Spirit.

But in the gospels and epistles, the focus is always on the relationship: how Father, Son and Spirit work together. John 16 and 17 is about Jesus going to the Father and the Holy Spirit coming to us. There is this interchange of persons that makes it quite clear the trinity is in partnership. Or think about Ephesians 1:3–14, ‘In Christ we were chosen … God had decided this … giving you the Holy Spirit’. Working together for our good and blessing.

And then, of course, there are the various blessings. Let’s finish with one of the better known: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14). Grace, love and fellowship are brought to you by a loving, relational God.

**Thank you, God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, for working together to bring blessings to this world. Help us to value your relationship and the relationships we have in this world. Amen.**

Thursday 18 November 2021

# Christ’s humanity

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human is from God (1 John 4:2b).**

Read 1 John 4:1–6

Christ’s humanity – pretty important! Important enough that for the writer of this epistle, it is part of our confession. Important enough that John’s Gospel makes it clear that Christ came into the world – ‘The Word was in the world’ (John 1:10); and then in verse 14, so many Bible versions state it so clearly:

* ‘The Word became a human, and lived among us’ (NCV).
* ‘The Word became flesh and made his home among us’ (CEB).
* ‘The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us’ (NIV).
* ‘The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood’ (The Message).

Pretty important. God in Christ is both divine and human. ‘When he lived on earth, he was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin’ (Hebrews 4:15).

It’s important because we have a God who identifies with us and is who we can identify with. He is like us in every way. He experienced emotions: disappointment, hope, anger and compassion. He experienced suffering: God knows what we go through when we suffer, as different as it may be for each one of us. He enjoyed life: attending weddings and feasts and mixing with those who make life interesting. He told stories (usually called parables): often leaving them hanging, challenging us to think through the meaning and consequences. He is like us: living and dying!

And, like God in everything! (Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15). So, Christ is divine, but he was willing to give that up, become human and become like us. Wow, a God like that appeals to me. Inviting me and you to join with him in living life to the full, to experience humanity in all its weaknesses and strengths and be part of divinity because of Christ in us.

What a gift; what a confession!

**Lord Christ, thank you for becoming a human in Jesus. Thank you for experiencing life on this earth, so I may have eternal life with you. Amen.**

Friday 19 November 2021

# Mercy and grace always present

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Keep yourselves in God’s love … with his mercy to give you life forever (Jude 21).**

Read Jude 17–25

It’s easy to be caught up in the times! To be annoyed at governments, frustrated about (others’) selfishness, wonder why the church has much less influence in today’s society and wish the world would end!

But the writer here – despite what was happening in the world at the time – encourages us. ‘Use your faith to build yourselves up’ (verse 20). And in verse 21, there is further encouragement: remain in God’s love. Live in his mercy. If there is an antidote to the end times and the dangers they will bring, this is it.

No matter whether it is the end times or not, God’s love is constant. His mercies endure forever, as Lamentations 3 tell us. Every morning, just as the sun rises (and it is streaming through my window as I write this), we are reminded that God’s love is ever-new. If we remember this each day and live it out, the world must surely be a better place.

It is God’s mercy that gives you life forever (verse 21). Just as the writer of John’s Gospel lets us know, living forever is not something in the distant future, but it is present for us now in God’s mercy. I don’t totally understand that, but I am secure in it. That doesn’t take away the horrors and worries of the world we live in, nor does it take away the realities of sickness, physical or mental disability or emotional upheaval. But it does provide a fortress, a buffer, a reassurance that the world cannot give.

God’s mercy and grace sustain us. In all the turmoil of the world (end times or not), mercy and grace are ever-present, as reliable as the sun each morning. Life forever, even amid chaos.

What a wonderful God we have.

**Lord God, thanks for mercy and grace. Thanks for the reminder each morning as we see the sunrise that you are present, that we can share in the life eternal you have won for us. Amen.**

Saturday 20 November 2021

# Awe-inspiring, powerful, so much greater

by Pastor Peter Bean

**The ocean waves are powerful, but the Lord above is much greater (Psalm 93:4).**

Read Psalm 93

If you have read anything I have written, you would know I love nature. I believe God chooses nature, or creation, as well as Scripture, to reveal himself.

Yet this verse and psalm puts things in context. Who hasn’t stood and watched with awe the majesty of waves rolling in off the ocean? Recently, my wife and I were fortunate enough to be at Ocean Beach, just north of Strahan in Western Tasmania, where the waves a kilometre offshore reach heights of up to 12 metres. Amazing. Spectacular. While the weather was what could be described as inclement while we were there, the ocean was still awe-inspiring. The waves were that powerful that no-one would venture out into them. They ruled that section of the earth and world!

But the Lord above is much greater! And we might add, the Lord present, with us here and now, is much greater. As wonderful, awe-inspiring and powerful as nature can be, the Lord is greater. Jesus showed that on the lake when he calmed the storm. The disciples’ response: ‘What kind of man is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!’ (Matthew 8:23–27).

I can’t imagine the wind and waves at Ocean Beach obeying Jesus! They are too wild, too powerful, too strong in themselves. But I can imagine it! I can imagine Jesus calmly taking my hand on that beach and saying, ‘Peter, watch this’!

The same Lord who calms the waves and wind lives in you and me. The same Lord who quieted the storm calms our storms. He quietens the winds in our lives. He takes the fissures and cracks and restores them to wholeness. This God of nature is also the God of our lives. More powerful, ever-present, bringing awe into the everyday and reassuring us of life!

**Lord of heaven and earth, God of wonders beyond our galaxy, be present in our everyday lives. Remind us that your power and presence is so much greater than anything we see in nature or experience in our lives. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.**

Sunday 21 November 2021

# Life-giver

by Maria Rudolph

**I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24).**

Read John 5:21–29

What is life-giving for you? When your favourite footy or sports team wins, does that make you feel alive? What about quality time with a person you love? It leaves you buzzing, invigorated, ready to take on the next challenge. Or maybe none of this resonates with you. What is it, then, that is life-giving for you?

And what does it mean that the Son gives life? Jesus gives life. What do we understand by that? God is our creator and literally gives us our lives, knits us together in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13). Just as God ‘breathed the breath of life’ into Adam in Genesis (2:7), we are filled with life because of him. And life as a Christian, as a follower of Jesus, is not limited to our earthly life. Because Jesus has died, you live forever. The blood of Jesus has won salvation and forgiveness for you. The blood of Jesus has covered over the power of darkness, so no ungodly thing can completely take hold of our lives and destroy us. You have been claimed by God through Jesus to have life to the full (John 10:10).

If you want to think about it that way, we rise up to new life with Christ every day. The power of the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see how we can tap into that exciting potential of being God’s vessel and his servant day after day. Life in God is to be found in serving others around us. Hold on to the solid foundation that you have a new life in Christ today. This new life is brimming with possibilities of how to be life-giving and Christ-giving to those around you. The fruit of the Spirit will guide you in this. Today, display love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23). This is how your life-giving God works through you in the power of his Holy Spirit. These fruits give life to the weary, the hungry, the sick, the sad. You can be a life-giver today because your Life-Giver tenderly embraces you as a dearly beloved child worth dying for.

How can you be a life-giver today?

**Jesus, my loving Life-Giver, I am so grateful to be included and accepted by you and that you would consider me worth dying for. I thank you for my life with all its joys and challenges, and I offer it to you today as a humble offering. Do with my life whatever you will; use me according to your purposes. Open my eyes and ears to be life-giving to the people around me today. Amen.**