
Strengthening Gospel Ministry

17 April 2020

Dear Congregation Member

I count myself very fortunate to have links with your church and I wanted to write to encourage you as we now face at least three further weeks of 'lockdown.'

First, a big 'thank you' for all you are doing to support others in your church and community. Churches up and down the country have shown themselves to be invaluable in caring for the vulnerable and bereaved, caring for one another, and demonstrating concern for their communities. This speaks volumes to a watching world – and I am very glad that huge efforts are being made to make services and courses as widely accessible as possible, because there is undoubtedly a new interest in the hope that Christ offers. We must continue to pray that as His Word is heard, hearts and minds are moved to repentance and faith.

Secondly, I do hope that the current inability to gain access to our church buildings isn't undermining your faith in any way. Ours is an 'invisible' faith (Hebrews 11:1). It doesn't depend on buildings or physical acts; it depends entirely on the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the One who makes it possible for us to have a loving relationship with the Father and gives us the assured hope of life forever. Despite the hardships of the current restrictions, it would be very good if one side effect was that it helped us individually, in our relative isolation, to look to Christ alone.

Thirdly, I hope you will join me in praying and working for the salvation of souls. At the moment, we all have to play our part in protecting the NHS and saving lives. Some do this in their role as medics and key workers; but all of us have a role in 'staying at home' as much as possible. However, over and above this, we cannot be oblivious to the fact that for many of us, a sense of our mortality and vulnerability have made us newly aware that we are not in control of our lives. For some of us, we will have experienced this directly in the loss of loved ones, and it will be important to share our grief with friends who care about us. However, many others will also be looking for sources of hope. As Christians we can do more than offer 'light at the end of the tunnel.' Our hope is based squarely on the actions and promises of Christ. When Jesus was asked about particular disasters (eg Luke 13:1-5), he said that we should be warned by them to avoid the worse destruction of experiencing God's final judgement – but wonderfully we do that by trusting what Jesus Christ achieved on the Cross when He took our sins (and therefore our judgement) on himself. He then rose from death, thus validating everything He had said about himself, and promised to us. As a

result, we can be united with Him in his risen life in a way that will not only change our lives here and now but take us through to 'life to the full' in eternity. With trust in the living Lord, we no longer have to feel vulnerable in the face of events.

So do please continue to pray for your friends; please keep in touch with your church family; and please invite those who are searching to 'virtual' church events and services. Finally, let's thank God for the encouragement of having a church family. Sometimes it takes something like the current absence of physical church gatherings to remind us of how precious they are – and therefore of the wisdom of Hebrews 10:25, that we shouldn't neglect to gather when we can do so once again.

With my prayers and best wishes

Rod Thomas
Bishop of Maidstone