



Sermon

Join the Celebration!

BIBLE SUNDAY 2012 : SERMON

Based on Psalm 19.7 – 14;
Isaiah 55.1 – 11;
Colossians 3.12 – 17

INTRODUCTION

Let's take a moment to each think about activities we enjoy. It might be something you enjoy doing regularly like

- Walking in the countryside?
- Enjoying a great meal with friends?
- Shopping for your autumn/winter wardrobe?

Or something special you only get to do sometimes, like

- Surfing or sunning yourself on the beach?
- Attending a top football/rugby match?

Or once in a lifetime events where you are watching history being made, like

- The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Pageant or that amazing concert in front of Buckingham palace?
- The final of the 100 metres Olympic race?

Either use power point slides/photos to illustrate each suggestion or for a more interactive style ask people to 'buzz' together about what they would really like to be doing.

Psalm 19 begins by celebrating the wonder of creation and there is absolutely every reason for us to enjoy all the kinds of things we've thought about – because they are ways of celebrating. More than that, of actually joining God in his celebration of the wonderful world he's provided.

But Psalm 19 goes on to something even better – yes, even more amazing and wonderful. Even the glory of the sky or the mountains is only the 'warm up act', for what is to come! The psalmist tells us,



'The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;' (verse 8).

To help us appreciate just how amazing it is that God has spoken to us and shared his heart through his words to us, the Psalmist uses evocative images.

'More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold' (verse 10a).

Golden jewellery has always been a prized indicator of wealth and status. Like the glittering earrings and exquisite necklaces worn by celebrities on the red carpet. Or the crown jewels. Gifts of gold are treasured and valuable – like a beautiful engagement ring with its promise of love and fidelity.

Like a golden gift that will last a lifetime, such is the privilege of knowing something of God's mind, as the psalmist did.

The psalmist then provides us with a very sensuous image of what that 'rejoicing the heart' is like ...

'Sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb' (verse 10b).

Wow, imagine that!

Describe a food/farming programme where this has been demonstrated.

The wonderful, rich coloured nectar oozing from the honeycomb and dropping into your mouth. I like Crunchie bars, I love Crunchie bar ice-cream – those sparkling chunks of sweetness! But this takes us to another level of ecstasy!

So today, as we celebrate God's gift of Scripture, let's join in the celebrations.

Here are some of the benefits the psalmist wants us to recall.

1. God's word revives us! (verse 7)

'I need a coffee!' after all that shopping; Marks and Spencers Café 'Revive' or Costa or Starbucks? What's your choice?

For a more interactive service either hold a vote or even serve some good coffee now!

Verse 7 tells us that God's word 'revives the soul'. That does NOT mean just the spiritual part of us – but the whole of us as the GNB puts it, 'it gives new strength'

The Book of Isaiah makes the same point in our other reading, Isaiah 55 – let's hear again some of those remarkable words ...

Please Read Isaiah 55: 1 – 3. emphasising 'thirsts' in verse 1 and 'delight yourselves in rich food' verse 2 and most of all 'so that you may live' in verse 3.

and Jesus picks up this image – John 4. 7-15 compare 37-39. He speaks of living water – not only

fresh – like a spring – and so life sustaining and giving, but also a spring in us. This is about a God-given joyful vitality that overflows from us to others.

Link to 'Bless you' campaign

That is why as we celebrate Bible Sunday we are encouraging people to find ways to put the Bible into action and 'Bless Others'.

Either refer to the news sheet or provide some ideas for local 'blessings' or say 'but more of that a bit later' You might like to use someone in your congregation's testimony here and/or the Bible Society stories provided below. The stories should illustrate the point that not only has Scripture brought them new life but they are motivated to pass it on.

Bible Society stories ...

Phalla Chrey

Phalla Chrey, one of hundreds of thousands of Christians in one of the fastest-growing churches in the world – Cambodia ...

'If I had a Bible of my own, it would be just me and God. I would read it slowly, and savour it word for word.' she says.

She used to have her own Bible, but she doesn't any longer.

Chrey, 22, gave her copy to her brother when he left the village. And, like so many Cambodians, she's a subsistence rice farmer: the cost of a Bible is a luxury and she simply can't afford another one. But she valued the Bible so much she was willing to make the sacrifice and give it away to give her brother the chance to hear from God.



Maria

Maria, aged 15, lives in Nicaragua and has Leukaemia.

It takes two hours in a taxi and four hours on a bus to travel to the only cancer hospital for treatment.

With support from Bible Society, Maria and her parents stay in a shelter in the hospital grounds during her treatment. There, they receive Bible

studies, counselling and prayer sessions, and the gift of their own Bible.

Rebeca, who works for Bible Society of Nicaragua, says 'When children receive a diagnosis, these are difficult moments. We give them hope that not everything is lost'.

You can see this hope in the words of Maria, who says, 'I thank God because, through the volunteers from Bible Society, I have been able to trust in Him. I respect the doctors, but I know that God is my doctor'.

'In the morning, I read the Bible that I received in my hospital room. I like Psalms 91, because I have learned to live under the shadow of the Omnipotent. That word I declare for my life and my family.

'When I was in hospital I was terminally ill, but now here I am, glorifying God because he took me out from there.'

Call to action:

Perhaps you could send some words from Psalm 91 to someone in need of comfort today.

2. God's Word enlightens the eyes. (verse 8)

Refer to Specsaver ads. We get into trouble if we don't see clearly! See clip <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OITBMnVyygY>

Yet even with the best glasses most people don't actually see clearly. They may marvel at creation but often don't see what's really good, worth celebrating, holding on to, meaningful and fulfilling.

There is much to confuse around us.

What values should we live by?

What will really give us a fulfilled and flourishing life?

Is the fulfillment we look for to be found in all that the ads tell us; is the best answer necessarily the most appealing ad?

What Scripture does is nourish us with a Godly and real world view. This helps us see the deceptions in all those people and things that seek to offer us 'this or that' as the answer to our problems. Even more vitally, Scripture helps us recognise that our worth is not in possessions but in being loved by God.

For a more interactive style – interview someone who can confirm this experience.

If you've ever talked with people who have recently had cataracts removed, you'll know their sheer joy of being able to see again after the operation, whether to read, see faces of friends or family more clearly, or watch East Enders!

That's why we can celebrate on Bible Sunday.

It could be powerful to ask someone from the congregation to explain how insights from Scripture have helped them 'see' life more clearly and get them to end by saying 'this is one reason why I want to celebrate God's gift of Scripture'. But keep this short - only two minutes maximum. Otherwise people will lose the flow of the service!

3. God's Word leads on to forgiveness. (verse 12)

So far, we have seen that Scripture can revive us and that it opens our eyes to see ourselves and our world more clearly. They are two great reasons to celebrate Scripture. But there's even more.

'Clear me from hidden faults'

The Bible uses all kinds of pictures to help us understand and feel the difference which God's forgiveness makes – such as washing and cleansing. Think about a time when you were really sweaty or had sand between your toes. The Bible is trying to tell us that being forgiven is liberating and restorative. Here it's more like knowing you're unwell and not knowing why; you've got a hidden problem – you go to the doctors and discover you've got some deficiency (thyroid/blood/chemical imbalance?) or you have an infection which, unbeknown to you, is dragging you down, sapping your energy.

The doctor prescribes treatment and it clears up the problem. 'I feel like a new man/woman; I've got so much more energy; I can enjoy life so much more' – these are the kind of things we say. They are also true of being forgiven by God. It's such a wonderful relief to know that all you despise about yourself and all that damages you, and all that blocks off your relationship with God can be dealt with. What joyful freedom real forgiveness brings!

So the psalmist knows that God is his personal refuge (rock) and redeemer (see verse 14).

If it is appropriate connections can be made from this point to Jesus Christ – the source for and evidence of our forgiveness by God: reference could then be made to the celebration that the father instigates for his returning son (Luke 15. 20–24)

CONCLUSION

So here are three great reasons why we should be leaping up and down with excitement and celebration that God has provided us with Scripture.

But you may be wondering about all of this – isn't it going a bit over the top?

How does this all work? The Psalmist didn't simply have God's laws on a scroll he kept in his cupboard – or even a clay pot – for safety. Oh no! Nor does he even mean he had learnt all these laws off by heart – although knowing the Bible well is a great advantage. He certainly doesn't mean he beats other people up with his knowledge of the Bible! No, he means he has soaked himself in God's ways and, in every way he can, he puts these into practice. As verse 8 in the Good News Version says,

Those who *obey* them are happy (compare verse 11 b)

So this is why we can celebrate the Bible.

Its message revives us; gives us a new way of seeing the whole of life and brings us deep and freeing forgiveness.

So come on, join the celebration and ensure you pass it on. As the psalmist's words have blessed us and as the letter to Colossians encourages us, let us bless other people with the words and deeds from the Bible.

Please read Colossians 3. 16–17 if appropriate!

It may be appropriate at this point to refer back to the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebration or an event your congregation organised or were involved in for the Olympics and remind people of the extra fun and energy there is of doing things together.

EITHER

We're going to celebrate by singing some great songs of thanks to God

We're going to celebrate by taking up an offering for the work of Bible Society; let's see how much we can raise together and know that others will be joining in the celebrations because of our generosity (2 Corinthians 9. 8 – 9).

AND/OR

We're going to celebrate by blessing others – there are lots of ideas in the news sheet/coming up on the screen; X Y Z are now going to hold up a placard and if you want to bless others through their 'project' then go over and find out more; in a home groups/cell groups we will be following this through – so please don't miss out

AND/OR

We're going to bless others by passing on our blessing from God through the Bible

- Join Bible a Month
- Take part in the Bless you campaign
- Share your story of how the Bible has helped you and encourage others
- Give as a church to the work of Bible Society

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