

2017 Annual Report

On the occasion of the opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, its minister Charles Haddon Spurgeon began by saying, "I would propose that the subject of the ministry in this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ."

I detect a subtle change across the board within evangelicalism. Many speak much about God but comparatively few about the Saviour, and about God as His Father and our Father. It was as if a remoteness had set in, a distance in relationship, that hesitates to use the familiar titles Father and Saviour. It was constantly emphasised to me as a young believer that it is the Holy Spirit's ministry to exalt the Saviour. That the Saviour is the Alpha and Omega the First and the Last (Revelation 1.8,11,17). And that our fellowship is with Him and with His Father (1 John 1.3).

That vibrancy that we are Christ's men and Christ's women, Christians, seems to me to be in danger of disappearing. Let it not be so. Let us love the Saviour more. "We love him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4.19). If the pre-eminence is His as being the head of the body, the church, as it is, and if He is before all things, and by Him all things consist, as He is (Colossians 1.17-18), then let us be careful and specific to attribute that pre-eminence as affecting every part of our lives. He is the head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1.22) - to the church local, the church global, to the church in heaven and in earth, to the church's individual members. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8.39). All resurrection is vested in Him. Eternal life is the gift of the riches of His atonement. It is all of Christ.

Our worship services are for Him. In the language of the Song of Solomon, He approaches us (even now, in this service) with words like this and many others besides, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes...How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine!" Our approach to Him (even now, in this service) is, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song of Solomon 4.9-10,16), and much else besides. May we be jealous that the subject of the ministry in this house, as long as this pulpit shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. And so in the worship of all our churches.

Similarly, but very briefly, though evangelicalism among our churches professes to believe the Bible, you wouldn't always think so. It is possible to visit churches of our persuasion where there is no reading of the scriptures till just before the sermon; and sometimes just a few meagre verses at that. No fruiterer would set out his stall on the market to sell his prize fruits and hide his ripest fruits away. They would be on show at the front. So should we showcase the scriptures in our services by making them prominent; demonstrably the authority for all we do.

One of the "fun" things, one of the exciting things, about life in Christ is to observe His providences and to meditate and act upon their significance. As it is written in Romans 8.28 and Psalm 76.10, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" and "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." Not long after we knew that we should be vacating 1 Lincoln Avenue last year, our home since 2002, number 37, owned by Christian friends in London, became available. We did not know that at this time last year. In the report we asked you to pray, commenting that there is a solution in the Lord to every challenge.

And so it has proved. We are indebted to the Saviour. We have downsized by about a third. Under the Lord's direction and in the Lord's timing it has been painless. And as for the help of the brethren in preparing our new home, so many of you spent many long hours of hard labour in love, one or two even staying in the house overnight to facilitate completion of the job. We have appreciated every one of you in the Lord and are loving being there.

Since 2003 we had held the Monday Club in our home, once peaking at 32 children, occasionally as high as 25 in the home at one time, but more normally at 15 or so. Neither the church nor ourselves wanted to let go of this work but the new house is too small, and does not have downstairs toilets as does number 1.

I don't know if I can adequately dovetail together the providences by which the Saviour indicated our way forward in response to prayer. The Particular Baptist Fund had made it known that certain lump sums could be made freely available for evangelistic work, and we applied for an award which was granted. It was about the time of the retirement of one of those who worship with us who secured a part-time job driving for Mencap. Soon after that they decided to replace their minibus, and through the good offices of our brother we were able to purchase it very reasonably with the funds we had received, with some left over for maintenance. It now meant that we would be able to bring the children over to Friston. The village hall was not regularly used at the time we wished to use it on a Monday and so we have been able to hire it. It is different from our home. An advantage is that the children may run about more and that we can play games. The disadvantage is that all materials for cooking and crafts have to be brought and are no longer to hand. Please pray for this children's work.

While away on a 3-day break in another part of the country in the providence of the Lord we met a couple whom we did not recognize. Upon conversation, it transpired that they had visited Suffolk recently. And yes, in the neighbourhood of Saxmundham. And yes they had been brought up locally, in a Baptist church not far away. And yes they were related to a couple who used to worship with us. And yes they had been reading my Bible notes that very morning, as published in the Geneva notes. Which brings me to observe that nearly all my consecutive ministry since I have been here is on our website together with a number of gospel sermons. My notes on Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are all there, I believe. My booklet "Swift to its Close," suitable to be read to the terminally ill, or for them to read themselves, is there, or may be had in hard copy form today here. Two lectures on the AV, given in the 400th anniversary year 2011, are there. They are there for the building up and comforting of the saints, and that seekers might find. They're all yours! "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3.21-23).

Another providence, the significance of which has yet to be played out under the mighty hand of the Saviour:- on a recent walk two Monday Club boys and their elder brother and myself came across a van stuck in the sand at Thorpeness. For health reasons I can't push, so I suggested to the boys that they might like to lend a hand. Before they reached the vehicle, the driver hopped out, extended his hand to me, "Michael" he said "you've been on my mind." He wanted someone to visit his mother. He had been a Sunday School boy over 50 years ago in Aldeburgh. Without my prompting he asked after Stan who was his contemporary. I told him of Stan's conversion, and Stan has since been in touch. My wife and I have visited his mum, who was converted in the sixties, and DV will do so again. Perhaps the salvation of this man and his sister, whom we knew from years ago but have lost touch with since, will be the outcome of such a providence. We love the Saviour's Creation, His providences, and, above all, we treasure His salvation.

I still do not feel able to preach at our Tuesday midweek service so soon after the weekly Lord's Day ministry and am very grateful to the deacons who lead and who set up the video Metropolitan Tabernacle ministry which is so profitable. Our deacons serve the fellowship in many ways, some high profile, others out of sight. And so it is with all the members and friends who worship here. Each contributes and, we trust, each is sustained by the public ministry of the word of God.

Let the Saviour have the last word (John 15.12-17). "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another."