

August 2012

Dear neighbours,

I hope it turns out to be a sunny August. It's so much nicer at holiday time. Oh for sunshine!

The Bible is full of word pictures to bring into focus some of its most helpful teachings. As it is sunshine time of year (though I can't promise it for the very day you read this letter!) I have chosen two of its pictures about sunshine to brighten your day.

Firstly, the Lord Jesus Christ is described as "the Sun of righteousness" in the last chapter of the Old Testament, "...unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4.2). The sun's warmth is welcoming. The most life-giving quality of the Lord Jesus Christ is His righteousness. Maybe righteousness is not a word you associate with warmth and light.

The word means to be right in the sight of God – right in every respect. Jesus Christ was totally without sin. As "the fulness of the godhead bodily" (Colossians 2.9) He was totally God and perfectly man in one and the same body. God to forgive sin. Man to live under the curse of death.

He committed no sin ever and therefore was not liable to the punishment of death for sin on His own account. God turned the trumped up charge which led to Christ's death to advantage, for the wrath of man shall praise Him (Psalm 76.10). Being innocent of sin, He by His death bore the sins of all His people instead. He took the place of, was substituted for, every sinner who believes in Him and repents of sin. His perfections, in other words His righteousness, are put to the account of everyone who believes on Him. So, as God will not punish anyone twice for the same sin, the believer is freed.

That imputed righteousness shines upon us. We can't earn our way to heaven – it is a free gift. It is given upon humble request and upon repentance. The qualification for eternal life (heaven) is that we belong to Christ, being identified with Him, and because of that His righteousness is credited to us.

This Bible way is so warm and relaxing. It rises like the sun. Earning salvation is banned because it nurtures pride. We would think ourselves better than others and make light of our own faults. The righteousness of Christ brings light. Christ's provision for our innermost soul is likened to what the sun is for our physical wellbeing. It is warm, welcoming, relaxing; brings light and the luxuriant growth of "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control" (Galatians 5.22).

Jesus does not have wings. Neither does the sun. But the sun used to be pictured by the ancients as a horse-drawn chariot with wings. Wings meant speed. And sometimes wings meant protection, as when Jesus said, "...how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings..." (Matthew 23.37). Here both meanings are meant. "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." A swift removal of deservedly felt guilty fears for the repentant sinner.

To receive the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life is healing to the wounded soul. It's nice to be healed physically, but the time must come for us to die. Soul healing lasts forever. This is the healing Jesus brings through pardon. And He protects us, keeping us safe till He brings us safely to eternity.

Secondly, Psalm 23 is one of the most famous parts of the Bible, particularly because of the words "...though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" (Psalm 23.4).

One of the things about a valley is that on a bright sunny day it can be in total shadow. It may have had a little sunshine for a while, but long before the sun goes down the shadow falls. Everybody else can be bathed in warm sunshine, but those in the valley are out of the sun.

There are many chill experiences of life – sicknesses, tragedies, disappointments (I am sure you can think of many others). It seems so hard that others are carrying on enjoying themselves as normal (so it seems to us) while we are going through hard times. It's like being in a valley.

Death casts that shadow, A loved one dying. The sentence of death in our own bodies. It is a lonely, cold experience out of the sun. But King David (who wrote the Psalm) says “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me”. The presence of the Saviour in all moments, but especially the most difficult, on life's journey is enough to wipe away every tear and to give us courage and strength by His comfort and protection. He brings sunshine into our lives though surrounding events are dire. “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16.33).

The Psalm says, “*though* I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”. Given the worst case scenario, death, it is still true of all the lesser shadows cast over our lives that the Lord will be with His people who trust Him. Death is the worst, the ultimate enemy; but the chill of any lesser bitter experience is still warmed by the presence of the Saviour.

Our services are held every Sunday at 10.45am and 2pm and on Tuesdays at 7.30pm. You would be made very welcome. A passage from the Bible is explained every time we meet for worship.

On our website (the address is at the foot of the previous page) there is a booklet I wrote some years ago for any who desire comfort from the Bible because they are dying. It is called Swift to its Close. I have copies in booklet form at home and would be glad to provide a free copy confidentially to anyone who wishes, but you may find it easier and more private to download.

Yours sincerely,