

## FRISTON BAPTIST CHURCH

Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” Psalm 76.10

Dear members and friends,

The Lord is turning everything upside down. “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2.10-11). Every tongue must acknowledge that He is God, whether willingly or otherwise. All opposition will be restrained.

The Lord is turning everything upside down. “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it...” (Psalm 24.1-2).

And we ourselves turn into another year. The old year was not very nice, and we are glad to see the end of it. But, let me ask you a question. You’re 49 one day and 50 the next. Does it make a startling difference? The purpose of a birthday celebration is to give thanks for the past, to assess where we’ve got and make any necessary adjustments to our lives and to look forward to the future.

So January 1<sup>st</sup> will not be apparently different from 31<sup>st</sup> December. But it does give us opportunity for fresh hope, a reassessment of our lives and thanksgiving that we’ve been brought safely through to this time of our lives by a watchful Saviour. “My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth” Psalm 121.2. Especially as 2020 was fraught with an unseen, but deadly, danger.

It is cloudless and sunny as I write. That gives people new optimism, perhaps; even a sense of wellbeing. But it can be misleading. I remember coming home as a minister from Great Ormond St with a couple whose youngster had just died of leukaemia. It was a beautiful day. Everyone we passed seemed to be chatting pleasantly. It seemed so unfeeling, so incongruous. We did not think because it was a sunny day that all was right with our world. If anything, a nice day made it worse.

So we must not be misled. A return to normality may not of necessity follow as 2021 unfolds. It is a mistake to think that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3.4). It will prove disastrous if any should be misled into thinking so. And when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, disaster will strike those who have carried on as if nothing cataclysmic could happen. Surely the pandemic through which we are passing shows us that all things don’t just continue; and that we must prepare our hearts for world shattering events and encourage others to do so.

The Bible describes four sore judgments which the Lord uses to warn the world about its behaviour. They are war, famine, wild animals and pestilence (Ezekiel 14.21). Jesus substitutes earthquakes for wild animals (Matthew 24.7), though the latter still account for many lives in parts of the world. We should take it seriously that we are living through (we may not all get through) a global “sore judgment” the scale of which has never been seen before. These judgments may be used in tandem, as when in 2020 large swathes of Asia were afflicted with locusts (wild animals!) and all the famine that follows, concurrently with Covid-19.

The LORD is bringing the world to its knees, financially, politically, educationally, logistically (the supply chain) and in our personal lives. The longer it continues the worse the complications will be. The Lord is using the media for His own ends, that we may all know the extent of what He is doing.

We are bidden by the Saviour to enter into His kingdom by the narrow (strait) gate. Most people go down the broad way, like a motorway, which leads to destruction. Let me quote to you from the Bible (Matthew 7.13-14) Jesus’ exact words. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate,

and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." He said that many go to destruction while few find spiritual and eternal life.

The first thing that an individual, looking for new hope as 2021 begins, must do is to repent of sin and turn to the Saviour. It is down to the individual, if the nation has gone astray, to disentangle himself/herself from the majority view and start afresh. If the nation is hurtling to destruction - though the nation may still repent as a nation and turn on a large scale away from its sin - but if the nation is continuing to invite the continual anger of God, an individual, though one of a few, may still enter that narrow gate.

So, first things first. A fresh start is the only remedy, and it has to be through Christ. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4.12). No other new year's resolutions will make any difference to the world, or to our own eternal destiny, if this is not done.

Remember that 2021 brings no alteration as it arrives. Vaccinations may seem to be lifting the gloom, but what if another strain of Covid develops? Only Christ can change things. 2021 will only prove a turning point if we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. And if we then remain faithful.

Even if there is not a substantial change such as a large scale turning to the Lord, the Lord may allow a little respite. But worse will follow. The Bible, in the book of Revelation (chapter 16), speaks of men being scorched with great heat, blaspheming his name and repenting not to give Him the glory. After which there followed such pain that they gnawed their tongues for pain and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. (I will not transcribe it because it is lengthy but in this connection please read at your leisure Deuteronomy 32. 23-26. Note the mention of two of the four sore judgments, this early in the scripture.) The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which we preach and must continue to preach is the only remedy for avoiding these terrible outcomes.

So the wise person begins the New Year with Jesus Christ. From that perspective we may assess correctly what we've done with our lives to date. We may repent of our failures. We may reconsecrate ourselves to Him. And, perhaps with a newly born again mind, we may understand how the Lord has brought us safely to this point in our lives, though we have not served Him and were previously unaware of His mercies. And then our praises and thanksgivings may be truly awakened.

We have constantly rejoiced over many years, and particularly now, that (in the words of Psalm 31.15) "My times are in thy hand". We have loved Deuteronomy 33.24, "as thy days, so shall thy strength be." And so we have found it.

Both Vivienne and myself wish you a happy New Year and in the words of Psalm 129.8 "we bless you in the name of the LORD".

Yours affectionately,

Pastor