

Weekly Newsletter: 19th September 2023

Reflection: Where are you put?

By Lorna Ferguson

"I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel." Philippians 1:12

I am writing this reflection from Gifu in central Japan. I am here for the 7th Japan Congress on Evangelism, a gathering of Japanese church and ministry leaders and missionaries. In advance of this Congress, a survey was carried out to get an up-to-date picture of the state of the church in Japan. The findings were published in May, and humanly speaking there is cause for real concern. The number of believers remains at less than 1%, the church and its pastors are aging and the future is not looking bright. If there ever was a time for leaders to come together to think about evangelism in Japan, then it is now.

While it is good and helpful to get facts and figures about the state of the church, however, we must not allow those to be the only things we consider. I am currently writing devotions for my Japanese church on the book of Philippians, and last week was considering verses 12-14 of Chapter 1. Paul is in prison, in chains, because of the gospel. I wonder how the Philippian believers were praying for him. Perhaps they were praying that he would be released quickly. After all, the Philippian church knew from personal experience that God could indeed open prison doors (Acts 16:25-28). It would make sense that they would want Paul to be released so that he could continue his work of sharing the good news about Jesus in various towns and cities.

Paul's perspective, however, is quite different. He reassures the Philippian believers that what has happened to him, namely the fact that he is in prison, has actually served to advance the gospel. The word "advance" here means to move forward, overcoming obstacles in the way. Some people no doubt saw Paul being in prison as an obstacle, something getting in the way, but Paul says that instead it has advanced the gospel. Paul gives two ways that this is happening. The first is that "it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ" (verse 13). We can imagine Paul in those chains, praying, singing praises to God, sharing about Jesus, all to people who might otherwise never have had the opportunity to hear about him. The word has gone out not just to a few people, but to everyone. And so the gospel was advancing inside the palace.

Secondly, because of Paul's chains, "most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear" (verse 14). In many ways this is surprising. We might think that seeing Paul in prison for the gospel would make other believers more afraid, less likely to

share their faith with others. Yet Paul says that the opposite is happening. They are becoming less fearful and sharing the gospel more. Paul doesn't explain why this is happening. Perhaps seeing Paul imprisoned and 'out of action' made the believers realise that they needed to step up and share the gospel more themselves. It could be that they saw Paul's attitude and trust in God despite his circumstances, and this encouraged their own faith. Or maybe they heard that the gospel was advancing among the prison guard and this gave them confidence that God was indeed working and that they too could be part of this advancement where they were. Whatever the reasons, but the gospel was also advancing outside the palace.

In verse 16 Paul writes, "I am put here". Paul knew that whatever his situation looked like from a human perspective, it was God who was in control. For him what was important was not his own circumstances but that Christ was being preached. So rather than prison being a place where he was prevented from sharing the gospel freely, it became an opportunity for him to share his faith with people who might otherwise never have heard, and in doing so other believers were also emboldened to share their faith.

David spent nearly a third of the last year of his life in hospital. In the UK the focus is on patients being at home where possible, but in Japan the doctors prefer to treat patients in hospital. Since he was always on the same ward, he was able to get to know the nursing staff and always chatted with them when they came into his room. And God gave him opportunities to share about his faith in Jesus. In our end-of-life discussions with the doctor, we were also able to explain our confident hope in heaven. After David died, we took some copies of the Japanese translation of his 'Musings', the reflections on life and his faith which he had written during his hospital stays. We pray that God will use these to advance the gospel there.

When we are 'put' somewhere we don't like or don't find comfortable, it can be tempting to ask for a change of location. But what if God wants us in that very place to advance the gospel? Or we may be fearful about sharing our faith with others. Are there people sharing their faith in difficult circumstances who can be an inspiration to us to share ours?

"Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should." (Ephesians 6:19-20)

Ladies' Bible Studies

We're looking forward to getting together **tonight on Zoom at 7pm**. We're going through Session 2 of Rebecca McLaughlin's 'Navigating Gospel Truth' and are meeting for five weeks (until Tuesday 10th October) on Zoom. Hopefully this will allow those who live at a distance or are working to attend. There is no pre-reading, homework or book to buy – just come as you are!

Contact Liz (Liz@holyroodevangelical.org) if you would like the Zoom codes and haven't received them.

Mission Prayer Meeting – this Saturday

We're meeting in person in the church for our next Mission Prayer Meeting at 9am this Saturday (23rd September). Please come along as we hear from and pray for our missionaries and those serving overseas. Tea and coffee will be served afterwards.

Book Group

Book group restarts this month. No specific book this time so come along and share your book recommendations with the rest of the group. Meeting at 9 Craigentenny Avenue at 3.30pm on 30th September. If you would like further information speak to Anncris (anncris@gmail.com).

Men's Discipleship 2023

By Joe Barnard

Does your spiritual life need a reboot? Are you eager to make closer friendships with other guys in the church? If so, men's discipleship will be starting back up in September. Our focus this Autumn will be deepening our understanding of basic truth by studying the Gospel Coalition Statement of Faith.

In-Person Option

- Time: Thursdays, 10:30am at Holyrood
- Topic: Gospel Coalition Statement of Faith
- Start Date: Sept 14th

Zoom Option

- Time: Tuesdays at 6:30am
- Topic: Gospel Coalition Statement of Faith
- Start Date: Sept. 12th
- Sign Up: Contact Joe to be added to the WhatsApp group

Special Men's Event- Saturday Sept 16th

Give thanks for the dry weather and the time enjoyed by the men walking up Munro Glas Maol (near Glenshee) last Saturday. Thanks to David Immanuel for taking this photo!



Ladies' Breakfast – Saturday 7th October

Our next Ladies' Breakfast will take place on **Saturday 7th October**. Eleanor Dickson will be our speaker as well as hearing an interview with Anna Barnard.

Please join us for a time of fellowship, teaching and prayer (as well as having our breakfast together!) A sign up sheet for food will be sent around later this week – keep an eye on your emails! There will also be a hard copy sign-up sheet in church on Sunday. Any questions, please contact Liz (Liz@holyroode-vangelical.org)



Mission Week 2024 - Put the Dates on Your Calendar!

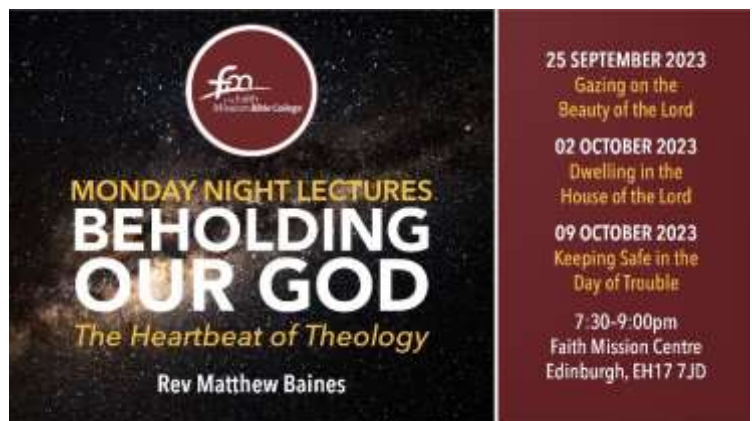
A team from 1st Baptist Tulsa (in the USA) will be joining HEC for a week of local mission Jan 21-28th of 2024. The basic idea will be that we will have a full week of outreach events targeting different groups in the Montgomery Street area. Each day the church will be open for a Warm Space during the day. In the evenings, there will be a broad menu of special events. The aim of the week will be to boost our missional presence in the local community around the building. The volunteers from Oklahoma will be providing extra hands to make all of this possible.

Our Mission Team is still finalising the details for the week. For now, put the dates on your calendar and begin to pray for the Mission Team as they lead us in this effort.

The Faith Mission – Monday Night Lectures

The Faith Mission have invited us to join their Monday Night Public Lectures. They have two three-week series planned, 'Beholding our God' and 'Incomprehensibly Made Man'.

'Beholding Our God' starts on **25 September 2023, 7.30-9pm, in The Faith Mission Centre.** There is no registration required and they are free of charge and open to everyone.



Church Calendar

For your prayers and info –

- Monday: Baby & Toddler Group from 10am – 11.30am
- Tuesday:
 - Men's Discipleship at 6.30am on Zoom
 - Pickleball and Table Tennis at 7pm
 - Ladies' Bible Study at 7pm on Zoom
- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting at 7pm on Zoom
- Thursday: Men's Discipleship at 10.30am in person in the church
- Saturday: Mission Prayer Meeting at 9am in person in the church
- Sunday:
 - Worship Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Joe Barnard preaching.
 - Home Groups



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