

Horsley Evangelical Church Sunday 28th June 2020. 6.30pm

Certainty in uncertain times. 2 Cor. 1 v 21-22.

Reading: 2 Cor. 1 v 12 – 2 v 4.

Hymns: MP 540 One day when heaven; MP1072 In Christ alone; MP 449 Love divine, all loves excelling.

Introduction.

This evening we are going to concentrate on just 2 verses of chapter 1 of this letter. Verses 21 and 22.

Here is Paul writing to his fellow believers in Corinth and reminding them of some wonderful truths which underpin their faith and indeed the faith of every believer listening in to-night. He speaks of “us” and “you” and then “us” and “our” in the second verse. Here is a **shared truth**, a shared experience for the Corinthian believers and also for you and me as Christians. Let me read them to you. **Read v 21 + 22.**

We live in **uncertain times** and we do not know what a day will bring. Life keeps on changing and we are reminded of the **fragility** of life itself. We may make plans but we do not know if they will come to fruition. But these verses set before us matters that are **certain** in these uncertain times because we have here **four works of God**. He who is unchanging. He who is utterly reliable and trustworthy. He who keeps His every promise and brings to fruition every plan, He has **accomplished 4 works** in your life and mine. Here is God at work in you and me. Here are **certain truths** in **uncertain** times.

In due course, we will see how God has worked in us to make us **stable** and firm in our lives. How He has **anointed** us with the Holy Spirit. How He has set His **seal** on our hearts and souls and even put the Holy Spirit into our hearts as a **guarantee** of so much to come. But I get ahead of myself, those are the jewels we are looking at to-night but first let me put these two verses in **context** for us. It would be wrong to rip them out of this chapter and just look at them on their own. Just as we study a piece of beautiful jewellery which has a number of stones, all of which are individually worthy of admiration, we miss something if we do not look at the whole and see the stones in their setting.

The Context.

Paul was on his **third** missionary journey. He had sent the letter which we know as 1 Corinthians while he was in Ephesus but then left there and went to Troas further north in Asia Minor or as we know it to-day, Turkey.

Paul had originally planned to go to Macedonia by way of a sea journey via Corinth and so could visit the church there on his way to and from Macedonia, before going on to Jerusalem with the money given to support the church there. But Paul **changed** his plans and instead went by land to Macedonia and only visited the Corinthians on his way back to Jerusalem. One visit instead of two.

He mentions this change of plans in **1 Cor. 16 v 5**. “After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you – for I **will** be going through Macedonia.” This change of plans however caused Paul to be **severely criticized** as we see in chapter one of his second letter which we read earlier. **V15** I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice” on the way to Macedonia and on the way back – **two visits**, two opportunities for Paul to minister to the church. He explains that he did not either **make his plans**, or **change** his plans, **lightly** but according to the leading he received from God. His plans are not made as the world makes plans, but he makes them seeking God’s will and blessing on them. He was not just saying he would come, to gain favour with them. There was no untruth or deception involved. He did not say one thing one moment and then another later. His words as it is put here in **verse 17** were not Yes, Yes one minute and No, no the next.

Paul is a godly man and he seeks to be faithful and true, **just as God is**. **V18**. His mind turns to God and so he expresses the fact that God always fulfils His plans and His promises are always true and carried out in full. Indeed, the example mentioned here in **verses 19 and 20** is that of Christ Himself. It was Christ that Paul and his companions had preached to them and all the promises of God are fulfilled in our Lord. **(read v19,20)**

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But Paul had **enemies** in the church at Corinth who were trying to elevate themselves and so needed to attack the character of the apostle. Seizing on this change of plans, they called him **fickle** so he should not be trusted. They suggested he did not really care for the church and he wasn't up to much anyway in his preaching. Look at **chapter 10 verse 10**. (read it) They are suggesting that he is two faced, speaking boldly and authoritatively in his letters when he is far away; and then when he is actually in Corinth, he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing. This is character assassination and utterly without foundation. In **V11 of chapter 10**, Paul makes it clear that he is consistent in all he says and does. **(Read it)**

In fact, Paul loves these people dearly, this chapter is full of their **close relationship** as we saw earlier; but in the face of criticism, Paul points them to Christ and indeed in these verses to what **God has done and is doing** in their lives. Here is the truth that Paul as an apostle of Christ, has consistently taught them. They are to recognise it and embrace it as they say "Amen" to it, see verse 20, and thereby bring glory to God.

With that context in mind, and I apologise for the length of my introduction, let us now look at these **four works of God** in all our lives as believers. In a world of uncertainty and shifting values, here is truth, here is certainty, here are the foundational truths of our faith. Let us **rejoice** in them, embrace them and live by them.

1/. God establishes us. V21. (Read it)

Our NIV version does not help us to appreciate the power of this statement, merely speaking of God making us stand firm. The ESV, which perhaps some of you will be following, puts it like this: "And it is **God who establishes** us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." This is what God has done in every believer, He has **established us**, He has **enabled us** to stand firm, He has given us a **stability**, a solid foundation whereby the very storms of life cannot take this away from us. This is the work of God in us when we first believed. **At conversion**, God was at work, making us a new creation, putting us into Christ, adopting us as a child of God and that work is so almighty and secure that no one can pluck us out of the hand of God. You and I as children of God are **safe and secure**, we are **established and stable** because our faith does not rest in us, but **in God**.

A **second** point to note here is that this is a **past, present and future** work of God. The loving God **has done** this in our lives, He is **continuing** to work in our lives and He will bring this work to **completion** as we enter the gates of heaven. This is a present and an **ongoing** work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, day by day. God is continuing to establish us and enabling us to stand firm in His love and truth. There is this **progressive** element to this work and so our stability is **increasing and growing** every day by the power of God within us.

Thirdly, with this work of establishing us, notice that it is happening in each and **every one** of us. It is happening, Paul says, in his life and in the lives of these Corinthian Christians, so he speaks of "both us and you". This is a **shared blessing** for them and it is a shared blessing for us at Horsley or wherever you are joining with us from at this moment. The people of God share in this work of God. We **stand together**, we **progress** together and we **grow** together. God at work in each of us for our good but also for the health and growth of the church of which we are a part.

Peter at the end of his first epistle writes in this way in **chapter 5 v 10**. "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered for a little while, will himself **restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast**." Notice how our sentence in **verse 21** finishes. It is in Christ. This is one of the many **blessings** of being "in Christ". We are established by the power of God every day in order that we might stand firm, stable and safe **because we are in Christ**. Let us trust and rejoice in this truth.

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2/. God has anointed us. V21.

This is an **amazing** statement which is full of meaning. To understand it we need to see the role of anointing in the Bible, particularly in the OT. The ritual of anointing was usually part of a solemn ceremony where a person was **set apart for a high and noble calling**. It was used with prophets, priests and indeed kings. Paul is asserting here that every Christian is **set apart** for the service of God. We are anointed when we are born again, not with a small quantity of oil, but with the Holy Spirit. It is part and parcel of us becoming a Christian that God sets us apart for His service by putting the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Of course, there may be **many subsequent occasions** when God gives His Spirit to us, as we serve Him.

As we talk of **anointing**, we cannot but be reminded that the very title “Christ” means “**Anointed One**”.

So once again we are reminded that this is all because we are “**in Christ**”. We are now part of the family of God, taken out of this world, with our sins blotted out, and now anointed with the Spirit **in order to serve** God for the rest of our lives.

This is a second wonderful work of God in our lives. Almighty God, who rules the universe, has **chosen you and me** to be used of Him for working out His great purposes of salvation in all of time. He has done this work. It is a certain work and it is also an **ongoing work** as He gives us His spirit every day according to our needs. Set apart to serve, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live to the glory of God. What a **high calling** this is! Called to be part of God’s eternal plan of salvation. Used of Him to His glory.

Notice also that the verse says “**He anointed US**”. All believers receive this anointing. We are all one in Christ Jesus. We are **all set apart** for the service of God. It is a **shared experience** as we work together in God’s harvest field. It is a shared experience as we support one another in **prayer** as the work of God is done. We have been anointed, endued with the Holy Spirit in order that we might **work together** for our Master. No Christian is meant to go it alone, God puts us into **fellowships** that we might work together as a family, and support one another in encouragement and in prayer.

We are **anointed as individuals**, for our salvation is individual, but we **serve together** in God’s army.

3/. God has sealed us with His Spirit. v22.

This work of God goes on as Paul tells us that God has put his **seal of ownership** upon us by the Holy Spirit. God puts His seal upon you and me. **What does that mean?** Let us look at a couple of verses in Ephesians chapter one in order to understand this concept.

Look at **Eph. 1 v 13-14**. (read it)

Paul gives us more detail here. When we believe, when we are born again, we are **marked by God with a seal** by receiving the Holy Spirit. “Marked by Him”. A “seal”. What does this mean to us? In the ancient world a seal had **two main functions**. First of all, it was a mark of **ownership**. It identified the thing sealed as the property of someone, a nobleman perhaps, or a king. For the Christian, we are sealed as a sign that we **now belong** to God, for we have been bought at a huge cost, the death of Christ. He has redeemed us unto Himself and so we are no longer our own, we belong to Christ. Not as some kind of slave of God but as a **beloved son or daughter**. So the reminder is here that we are **no longer our own** to do just as we will according to our own sinful desires. No, we belong to our Redeemer, we owe Him our life and we are to live according to His will. We are to be led by the Holy Spirit within us, who is this very seal on our heart that we might please God and not grieve Him. It is high and noble calling. We have been anointed into this role and it is the way of happiness for every believer.

How does the hymn put it, (**MP 374**), “Jesus my Lord will love me for ever, from Him no power of evil can sever, He gave His life to ransom my soul, now I belong to Him. Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me, not for the years of time alone, but for eternity.” God has put his seal of ownership upon us. Praise His name.

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Secondly, the seal guaranteed the **security** of the item. No one would tamper with a document that had the royal seal on it. Here is a **wonderful security** for the Christian. We are His for all eternity. Here again is that stability, that establishing, that ability to stand firm because we are in Christ. **No one can break this seal** on our hearts because it is a work of the Holy Spirit. We are safe in Him because we belong to Christ. Once again, it is something **we all receive**, so we can **rejoice together** in this work of God in our hearts.

4/. God has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. V22.

Finally, we read in this verse that God has given us His Holy Spirit as a **deposit**, a down payment, a **guarantee** of what is to come. We have already seen what a **wonderful gift** the Holy Spirit is to us as believers. But now Paul says it has a further meaning for us. The Holy Spirit in our hearts **assures us** that God is going to continue His wonderful work in our lives and that one day He will certainly bring us to glory where we will receive all that God has promised us in Christ Jesus. The Spirit is the deposit, that guarantees **the rest will be paid**. Just like we have to put down a deposit on a costly purchase to show our intent, our commitment to one day pay the rest. Gloriously, this is true of God. He has **committed Himself to complete** the work of sanctification in our lives and then one day make us perfect as we see Jesus face to face. If all this was down to us, we might change our minds, or circumstances might intervene and change the outcome, **but not with our God**. He has purposed to save you and me; and **He will!** He has given us His Holy Spirit as an utter guarantee that He will **keep His promises** and **complete** the wonderful work He has started.

Do you sometimes **doubt that** you will stay faithful to Christ? Well, when you doubt, remember it is **not about your striving**, if it were we would all fail. No, it is God who is at **work within us** and He is faithful and will keep us and bring us to heaven. How can you be sure? Have you got the Holy Spirit in your life? Yes, then He is the guarantee of what is to come. **Trust in God and rest in Him.**

With the Philippian church, Paul puts it like this in **chapter 1 v 6**. "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." or as we saw in Ephesians 1 v 14. "The Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory." Precious verses to dwell on and remember!

Conclusion.

Has this **all happened to you**, my friend listening in? Have you repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of all your sins? God so loves you, as an individual, that His Son died on a cross to bear away your sins and give you eternal life. **Trust** in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation and all these wonderful works of God will happen in your life. God has promised it and He **always keeps His promises!**

Fellow believer, how wonderful is our God! In Christ we have our sins forgiven, we are right with a Holy God and He has done all this for you and me. God, just as He created this world with a word of command, He has **established** you and I in His family and church. He has **anointed us** with the Holy Spirit to set us apart for His service.

He has put His **seal of ownership** upon us so that we now belong to Him, our Heavenly Father.

He has put **His Spirit** into our hearts that we might be assured that we are on the road to heaven.

We know that He has **started** this good work in us and will bring it to **completion**.

Finally, **we all share** in these works of God. We rejoice together, we praise God together, we thank God together, we serve God together.

We all have the same mighty Spirit of God in our hearts and so we can rely on our God to establish us and to keep us and to bring us to heaven. All this is not for our glory but for **the glory of God**.

He is the Sovereign Lord of the universe. His purposes are the **one certain thing in all the uncertainties of life**. **How good is the God we adore!** Let us pray.