



He's Got the Whole World in His Hands

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you from Chris Fry and myself, may God bless you all in this new year 2013.

I often reflect on the progress of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in the UK and in our city itself. I don't think there is any doubt that our society is turning away more and more from the Creator-God of the Bible, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The 2001 census reported that over a quarter of the population of Brighton & Hove stated that they had no religion. This was the second highest percentage of any authority in England & Wales. Nearly three fifths (59%) of the population stated that they were Christian. This is significantly lower than the South East average (72.7%) and that for England and Wales as a whole (71.7%). The 2011 census showed the percentage of people calling themselves Christian had declined still further, as our local paper, the Argus states, "Just 117,276 (42.9%) selected the national religion as their own, down from 146,460 (59.1%) in 2001". Personally I would have thought that the true number of Christians—not in the nominal sense, but in the born-again sense that Jesus spoke of—would be far, far less than 42% of the population.

How are we to respond to figures like these, as individuals and as a church? I think there is much comfort to be gained by considering the truth often referred to as "God's Sovereignty". God's sovereignty is that teaching, or cluster of teachings, that states that God is in control of all that happens. He does not control all things with the same degree of approval in each case; nor with the same style of intervention; nor does his control remove human responsibility—for praise or blame. This is quite a mind-boggling teaching isn't it?

God's sovereignty is expressed in the song that says "He's got the whole world in his hands". And in the saying of Jesus: "not [a sparrow] will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:29, NIV). And in the comment of Joseph to the brothers who had actively sought to have him abducted or even killed: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good for the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20 NIV). The book of Revelation expresses this idea by showing us, in the centre of all things, the throne—and the throne is not empty. For us this means

1. *God is not "losing the battle" against unbelief.* He presides over the attempts of humankind to disobey him, reject him, belittle him, remove him from his world and our society. As Psalm 2 says "the one in heaven laughs". God is not wrong footed, not intimidated, but rather amused that human beings could be so ridiculous as to think they can defeat him. God rules over all the nations, over every heart, every political trend and decision, over the census and the tide of opinion.

2. *The sovereign God is still able to save men and women, boys and girls.* Every conversion to faith in Christ is a mighty miracle. All human hearts are dead in transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Like Lazarus each human being lies dead (spiritually speaking) in his or her grave. Each one needs a wonder-working word from the Saviour who commanded the dead one "Lazarus, come out!". He is still able to do this, "surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. (Isaiah 59:1)

3. *The sovereign God still loves to work by his word.* That is what he did in the case of Lazarus. That is the means that Paul employed when he went to the godless city of Corinth "I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified ..." (1 Cor 2:2). That was the message the Paul believed would make the difference. We need to hold on to that confidence ourselves today.

4. *The sovereign God is still the God of grace.* God's sovereignty and his grace are linked together in New Testament thinking. He is powerful to Judge, yes; but he is powerful to save. He is the reigning King who can rightly condemn, but he is also the sovereign Saviour who can—with a word—forgive all our sins. (Mark 2:1-12). Our theme in the glory to come will be the praise of the glory of his powerful grace.

In 2013, let us continue to trust the one who sits upon the throne, let us ask him to do great miracles of salvation, all the more at the time when great judgments of disapproval are completely appropriate. Let us wait to see him show to people here on earth the wonder of his name when so many others are dishonouring his name. God is still on the throne!

May his blessings be ours,

Philip Wells
Pastor.

On the Record

Replacing the Secretary's Report, your editor provides a summary of recent highlights

Visiting Speakers

In addition to the regular ministry support we get from Christ Church Haywards Heath, we have welcomed several visitors over the last few months. In August, Phil Moon (Bishop Hannington Church) came, and we had our annual visit from Michael Steedman. Then in the Autumn ex-Calvaryite Anthony Smith brought us news from York and Ellis Potter (L'Abri) made us all think as he always does. Bob Mahoney (former policeman and missionary) brought a robust message, and a Wednesday evening visit from David Blower (Agapé Birmingham) discussed street performance art based on the model of the old testament prophets! Most Sunday messages can be found on the website. Phil and Chris often preach elsewhere, and several Calvary men continue to support the Pilgrim Home services.

More Hands to the Plough

On the 1st October Ben Alltimes (with family) and Katharine Crompton took up their roles as Gospel Worker and Associate Worker respectively. Be sure to read Ben's challenging article in this issue.

Arundel Last Shout

A week of prayer preceeded our final Arundel YHA weekend 5th-7th October, at which prayer was also the main theme. This Youth Hostel has now closed, so our next weekend away in April will move to Dalesdown.

Baby Boom

A few years back we were praying for more families in the church. Now we have a regular baby boom. On 13th October we met to consider ministry to, and provision for, children in the church. This is stretching our resources, but it is delightful to have such a challenge. The Parent and Toddler group continues to thrive, and you can read Maria's article on the Sunday Club. We continue to pray for more teenage children in order to start a group in this age range. But the Young Adults (18-35) now have their own meeting.

Reboot

Several existing and dormant ministries have been restarted. The 17th November musical charity evening revived what was a regular event when Anthony was here. We had put it on hold due to a dearth of musical talent, but that is no longer a problem. You cannot miss Rachel's enthusiasm in her report. Ben has reinvigorated Calvary International Café with wassailing, folk-dancing and pancake evenings. Men's breakfasts have also been relaunched with a variety of general interest talks aimed at drawing in a wider audience. Back pain and eco-houses have been tackled so far.

Up till now the LORD has helped us

During November we spent some Sunday evenings reviewing the history of the Brighton Railway Mission and Calvary EC. The story of founder Elizabeth Gates is always an inspiration. The early twentieth century saw a lot of missionary enthusiasm, although we are a bit thin on the details of this period. But the highlight of this historical review was on 18th November when we welcomed some old friends of CEC to an afternoon reunion tea. Some are still living in the Brighton area, others came from further afield. We giggled at the old photographs and recalled other absent friends now scattered worldwide. Some have turned aside, but most are still following Jesus with thankfulness for the spiritual foundations they found at Brighton Railway Mission during the era of Pastor Les Hill in the 1970 and 80s. Following the tea, testimonies to the encouragements of those days enlivened the evening meeting. When you reach your editor's advancing age, it is easy to be nostalgic. But it is better to remember that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that he continues to lead us forward.

Steve Ellacott

Music Evening Helps Recovery

Who would have known that such talented people were hidden within the church family here at Calvary? Well in November all was revealed in a musical extravaganza showcasing the musical gifts several of the congregation have been blessed with. It all started wonderfully mellow with the beautiful voices of Katherine and Lindsay, swiftly followed by the flowing fingers of Adam with a piano master class. Next, things took a different turn with the double act of Phil and Mark. We sang along, we danced along and basically had a lot of fun!

What would be a gathering without some food? Special thanks to those who contributed and helped; it is always appreciated. The interval brought time for food and an opportunity to hear about the work we would be supporting. By God's grace we were able to raise £286 (and a few euros!) to support 'Recovery', an organisation which trains people in cognitive behavioural therapy; essentially helping them to help themselves escape substance misuse and addiction.

So with our bellies full and expectations high what would the second half bring? First a real treat and chance to hear the soulful tones of Colleen, who has definitely still got it! A slightly more youthful singer then offered up a slice of Eva Cassidy which I hope everyone enjoyed. It certainly chilled things out again

ready for the fabulous finale. A special thanks goes to the ladies of Calvary for your hard work and willingness to sing your hearts out. You rocked! A revival sometime soon I hope.

A fantastic evening was had by all, both visitors and members alike. Music is truly wonderful and always best when live. What could be better than an evening with friends, with top class entertainment and with an opportunity to support a worthy cause.

Rachel King

Sunday Club

Last term, we had between 7 and 9 children in the Sunday Club group whose ages range from 4 to 13 years. Most of the children are boys and the atmosphere is lively. We learnt about the birth of Jesus, then spent several weeks rehearsing a nativity play, which Rachel Rayfield had written. Rachel and I had put up a back drop which consisted of the inside of a stable. While we enjoyed the experience of doing the play, the process was subject to a variety of mood changes. At the final dress rehearsal, there was no Mary, Joseph and the shepherds and wise men were played by adults. However, on 16th December, a compromise was found and the play went ahead. We had a Christmas party on 23rd December which allowed the children to relax and enjoy themselves.

This year, we spent four weeks on prayer and in the six weeks or so up to Easter we are revisiting the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Maria Wells



Not much space for photos in this issue, but we had to squeeze in this one of the nativity play.

Ministry to Men

In October, 2012, Ben Alltimes joined the full time ministry team at Calvary as Gospel Worker and Community Chaplain. In this article he describes a key aspect of his work.

One of the greatest challenges facing the church in this country is the need to reach men with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. There can be no question that a solid body of godly men is vital to the health and growth of a church, but the fact is that in many churches men are firmly in the minority and are becoming increasingly hard to reach. The statistics show that the gender ratio in English churches is 60% women to 40% men, but anecdotally the ratio is often nearer 70:30. Over the last 20 years 50% of men under the age of thirty stopped attending church services. It has been claimed that males in their twenties are one of the most unreached groups in today's society. From a human perspective the situation looks quite bleak, but we know that God is still in the business of saving men. We also know that we all have a role to play in this task, both as individuals and as a church.

At Calvary we are blessed to have a healthy number of believing men and good contacts with a growing number of other men. Although we thank God for this, we need to continue to build upon this strong foundation. Of course we want to reach everybody, both men and women with the good news of Jesus. We are not out to cause gender division! The Gospel message is the same for both men and women, but perhaps we need to consider specific ways in which we can communicate that message most effectively to different types of people. After all, the Bible makes it clear that there are differences between the sexes which should be recognised and celebrated rather than denied and vilified. Our society has largely lost sight of these distinctions, but we should surely be helping men discover what the Bible says specifically about Christian manhood and the unique and precious roles of husband and father. Our boys need to grow up with godly male role models and mentors who can demonstrate what Christian discipleship is all about. Our sisters in Christ need godly men who will make godly husbands. There are few spheres of church life where the benefits of men's ministry will not be felt.

“There has got abroad a wide-spread notion that to follow Christ is to sink one's manliness and turn milk-sop” said Charles Spurgeon. I wonder if men are sometimes put off even entering a church by the perception that it is for ‘wimps, women and weirdoes’ and that it has nothing to say to them about their lives. This doesn't mean that we need to give the church an image makeover or be seeker-sensitive to the point that we change who we are and what we do in order to please people. The Holy Spirit has the power to draw men and we need to have confidence in the proclamation of the

Gospel and the preaching of the Word. Having said that, we also need to ensure that we do all we can to create opportunities for men to hear that Gospel in an environment that is man-friendly and not overly feminised; an environment in which men feel free to ask questions, speak openly and to be themselves as men.

We need to emphasise the fact that Christ calls men to participate in a great cause and to lay down their lives for something that really matters. We need to apply the Bible's teaching so that its relevance is grasped just as readily on the building site and in the boardroom as it is on Sunday morning. We need to provide authentic friendship and a sense of comradeship for men in the church, or they will simply seek it elsewhere. We need to talk frankly about Christian manliness with all its struggles, challenges, joys and victories. And if men will not come to us we will need to do what the Lord Jesus did and go out into the streets and the byways of the city to meet them with the life-changing message of the Gospel. Above all we must point men to the Saviour who provides for us the perfect example of godly manliness and sacrificial love.

I hope that these few thoughts may prompt us to consider how we may reach men with the good news of Jesus and that they will encourage us to pray for this important ministry.

Ben Alltimes

Testimony

I've had the privilege of being born into a Christian family who have taught me the Bible and about Jesus ever since I was very young. This meant that I've always believed in God's existence and creating power. I went with my family to Caversham Evangelical Church in my home town of Reading. This continued on into my secondary school, where I had Christian friends and was involved with the Christian Union at the school. It was about this time that some of my friends were baptised. I found this quite difficult as I was one of the group, but didn't feel ready for baptism. I was regularly reading the Bible and I felt quite left out that others were becoming Christians and being baptised; but that I wasn't. I felt that I believed the Bible; but I knew it more like a series of facts on an academic level rather than hearing the gospel in my heart. And I certainly was not repentant.

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As I carried on through school and starting looking at university, these matters of salvation went off the radar a bit and went to the back of my mind. I would be in church on a Sunday and think 'I haven't opened my Bible or prayed since I was here last week'. I knew that this wasn't right, and yet these thoughts didn't change my actions. When I came to Brighton to be at university in 2007, I became even more lax about these things. I came here to Calvary, knew I was being taught and welcomed, but still I did not commit to Christ. I remembered how close I had felt to being saved when I was at school, and how far away that now seemed. Remembering this prompted me to get back into a habit of reading and praying. I was still trying to get my way into heaven by 'doing Christian things' rather than submitting to God's sovereignty. I went through periods of time when I felt like I was saved, but never feeling sure. Then something would happen and I would fall back into sin through temptation and I would say to myself 'How can you be saved? If you were saved and loved Christ, then you'd never have done that'. When I was in a Christian environment, I acted like a Christian, but wasn't. And I could fall down from that pretend position very quickly.

Then I was in Zambia last summer as a part of my medical training. I was in a continual Christian environment for eight weeks, and this was helpful for getting me to stay in a 'Christian' frame of mind and to build good habits. While I was there, we looked at how we can make sure that we make every effort to enter through the narrow gate. The more I thought about this, and read the gospel, and read 'The Gospel as it Really Is', I examined myself and committed myself to God. I felt that I had been using doubt or uncertainty as an excuse for not fully committing to God. I had been setting the bar at perfection, and when I fell short I thought that this meant I could never be a Christian. The bible tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; and the only way to regain this perfection is through Christ's perfect and blameless life. With earnest prayer for forgiveness; through talking through some of these issues with Phil; with gentle encouragement and questioning from my now fiancé Rachel; and, most importantly, through submitting to the authority of God, I know that I am a sinner and that nothing I do myself can change that. Only the fact that Jesus took the punishment for my sins as he gave himself as a sacrifice for me can save me from my sin. I know this and I believe it, and so I know that I am a Christian. This has only been the start of my Christian journey. I am very conscious that I still sin. But I am clear that I am trusting in the Lord Jesus alone to be my Saviour. On the basis of God's promises I wish to profess faith in Christ by being baptised.

Adam King

*Adam King was baptised at Calvary on 10th June 2012.
Adam and Rachel were married on 11th August 2012.*