

NOTES FOR SPEAKING

Meeting: Freshwaters Christian Fellowship

Date & Time: Sunday 3rd January 2010

Title: Arise and Shine

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Introduction

Isa 60:1-3

Those who were with us may remember that I mentioned this verse on Christmas day as our message to those who are sitting in darkness – those who are resigned to darkness and don't even know there is a light to search for. We need to declare to them arise shine for your light has come.

This message, however, is not just for others, it is also for us. We who know the light of the World must arise and shine – for also as I said on Christmas day – we are the light of the world, a city set on a hill.

Harlow's 'Lullaby'

You will all know by now that I believe that there is a spirit of apathy over Harlow, particularly in relation to spiritual things and it is so easy for us as Christians to take on-board that apathy rather than challenging it.

As I was praying about this the other morning I felt that there is something like a lullaby being sung over Harlow that brings a sleepiness and apathy to those that live here. It sings of the **futility of spiritual things**, it sings of **the comfort of the material world**. It sings of the **foolishness of passion and zeal**. It sings of **religion**. It sings of **the busyness of life** and that **we can pursue our spiritual growth in a tomorrow that never comes**.

It sings **through the priorities and conversations of those around us**. It sings **through the media**, it sings **through our own selfish and sinful inclinations**. **It is rarely violently anti-Christian because that might stir us to fight – it is just gently disparaging, discouraging, mocking even**. It quietly saps hope and faith.

In this context it is so easy to enter into '**survival mode**' where we do the minimum to stay spiritually alive, let alone reach out to others. When we do reach out we are quickly discouraged, a few rejections, a few disappointments – the reason is that **the lullaby that quenches our zeal contributes to the blindness of those who have not yet come to know the Lord**. It sings there is nothing there, there is no point in seeking, stay as you are, find comfort in what you know.

How do we respond?

The lullaby is like the **songs of the sirens in Greek mythology** who with beautiful enticing songs lured sailors to destruction on the rocks. If we are to avoid being shipwrecked ourselves **then we need to listen to a different song – the song of the**

king, the song of love and sacrifice, the song of humility and devotion the song of wholehearted commitment and passionate living. We also need to shine as a lighthouse to warn others of the danger of the rocks and to ensure that the song of the King is heard above the sirens of Harlow singing the lullaby of death.

There is a **partnership** that Isaiah speaks of in this short passage we have read – Jerusalem, or Harlow, or Freshwaters – or you – arise and shine – and the glory of the Lord rises and shines over you. We need to play our part – to rise up, shake off our apathy and to shine through our passionate engagement with the Lord and His purposes – then the Lord will add many times greater light by reflecting from us His glory.

So how can we arise and shine? – Well here are a few suggestions.

Prayer

2 Cor 10:3-6

It is essential that we recognise that the battle we are waging is not just physical – it has its roots in the spiritual realm – we can't win it with human reason or willpower, we need spiritual weapons and **the place where such weapons are imparted and wielded is in the place of prayer**. There we **receive God's wisdom, His solutions** – there we **declare His victory** – **there we plead for the salvation and healing of those we love**.

We have spent the autumn focussing on outreach and I hope we are all eager to share with those around us in the words of **1 Peter 3:15 'the reason for the hope that we have'** – but as good as we may become at sharing with others, unless we engage in prayer we will not see people come to faith. Why? – Because it is not primarily about human understanding and reasoning – **it is about spiritual blindness**, it is about people being lured to their destruction by the lullaby of Harlow – and we need to address this in prayer.

We have shared and will share more about our aims as a Fellowship to be a worshipping people, a prophetic people, a proclaiming people and a family people – there are many things we can do in order to play our part in fulfilling these aims – but the first part is prayer.

I have spoken to Phil Jones and to Robert Robb over recent weeks and while speaking to them I have felt stirred to specifically thank them for their prayerful investment in Harlow. I am convinced that many of the advances we are seeing today, like our welcome into Schools, the Council and the Police, are a direct result of that intense period of prayer and proclamation that Phil led in the prayer centre and Rob proclaimed on the streets. This is great – but the challenge I am left with is what are we sowing now for the future and in terms of prayer the answer is very little.

Let me challenge you this morning – how is your prayer life? Are you being equipped for the battle or are you relying on others?

We provide a variety of ways to engage in corporate prayer at Freshwaters, Jesus 1st, Freshwaters Prayer, Prayer for Harlow, The Hungry, prayer before our meeting on a Sunday – are you taking advantage of these opportunities or are you leaving it to others. When we shared about the aims of the fellowship we asked you to come along to those prayer meetings which related to the aims you identified with. Only a handful of people came – and funnily enough they are the people who would normally come anyway?

You may say to me we don't need corporate prayer we pray on our own. Firstly I would say that there is a dynamic in corporate prayer you can't have on your own. **There is a power of agreement and of course the promise of Jesus that where 2 or 3 are gathered in My name there I am in the midst of you**¹. The second thing I would say is 'are you really engaging in prayer at home alone?' Is your prayer life growing and developing? – The likelihood is that if you are not engaging corporately nor are you personally.

Let me encourage you as you look forward to 2010 to commit yourself to developing your prayer life both personally and corporately. If you don't have a regular time of prayer with the Lord then start this week. Maybe just starting with 5 or 10 minutes a day and then once a week having a longer time. If you haven't attended any corporate prayer meetings during 2009, set yourself a goal of attending at least a few in 2010, and don't wait until December- who knows you might even enjoy it.

Opposite spirit

My second suggestion for combating the lullaby of apathy over Harlow is to live in the opposite spirit. Zeal is a word not often used these days but one that I think is appropriate as we consider living in an opposite spirit to apathy in our town. Zeal is defined as 'energetic and unflagging enthusiasm, especially for a cause or idea'

Our God is a Zealous God – in a number of places in the Old Testament we are told the Zeal of the Lord will accomplish the task.

You may remember the passage where Jesus confronts the traders and money changers in the temple, dishonouring His Father's house, recalling Jesus' actions the disciples were reminded of the passage from **Psm 69:9 'Zeal for Your house has consumed Me'**. Jesus didn't turn a blind eye to the actions of those who were there, He didn't even politely ask them to desist – he was filled with passionate indignation and fiery zeal He drove them out.

Are we Zealous for God and His kingdom – are we stirred to action when we here of injustice and oppression. Do we passionately defend the honour of God's name? Do we serve Him with a fire in our hearts? Such zeal burns away apathy – such zeal starts a fire that will light the path for many.

If we are lacking in Zeal for the Lord let's ask Him to stir a fresh passion in our hearts – a fresh boldness in our words and actions.

Holy Spirit

My final suggestion this morning for combating the lullaby of apathy over Harlow is to increase our dependence upon and our response to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit **reveals to us the song of the king – and enables us to sing it. The Holy Spirit can empower us to live the lives we're destined for rather than the lives we've settled for.**

Come to the Lord daily and ask Him to fill you afresh with the Holy Spirit. Be sensitive and responsive to the Spirit's promptings. Refuse to quench the Spirit when He asks you to do something, by putting it off, or changing the subject. **Use the gift of tongues to pray in the spirit** – dare to do that which you cannot do but by the Spirit.

Conclusion

There is much we can thank God for from 2009. New people we have welcomed into membership in Freshwaters, opportunities that have opened up for us to engage with the community in Schools, on the streets and through our own relationships. There have been personal and corporate highs and lows, victories and defeats – but 2009 is over a new year has begun.

What do you see in 2010, I see a vast potential, potential for growth, potential for change. Harlow can be reached but we must overcome the lullaby of apathy first in our own lives. We can do this through prayer, through our Zeal for the Lord and through our dependence upon the Holy Spirit.