

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2017

## **Break my heart**

### Introduction

- Before I start, I need to warn you that you could well leave here this morning with more questions than answers. I want to challenge our thinking – without necessarily providing the solutions at the moment. I'm being challenged myself, and I don't currently have the answers– so I couldn't give them to you if I tried! But I do want to share the challenge with you, because whilst it's a personal challenge for me, I also believe it's a challenge for the church – us here at Freshwaters, but also the wider church. Fasten your seatbelts this could be a bumpy ride!!
- Who prayed for your salvation before you became a Christian? Do you know? Often, it's people who know us personally - friends, family or colleagues (Auntie Jean).
- Aren't you thankful for those people who prayed for your salvation and had the courage to share the gospel with you?
- I trust and hope that we all have unsaved friends, family or colleagues who we are praying to become Christians, but what about those people who don't know any Christians? Who's going to pray for them? Do we care? Is it our problem?
- Until recently, I was a bit 'token gesture' about the 'general lost' – I would pray vaguely at times for those I didn't have close relationships with – maybe the children of friends, or people in my street / Harlow – and would join in with corporate prayer for the 'lost' – but, to be brutally honest, it didn't really get to me; it didn't connect with me; I didn't feel a great burden for the unsaved in general.
- However, at a PIH Meeting in November, we were worshiping as usual, when we sang a familiar song:

I see the King of Glory [Bridge]

*Break my heart for what breaks Yours,  
Everything I am for Your Kingdom's cause  
As I walk from earth into eternity.*

- As we sang those lines, God really did something in me – He broke my heart for those people who have no relationship with either Him or me – strangers who aren't Christians.
- It freaked me out slightly – I'm no evangelist! – but it's made me pray about and consider what God wants me to do about it. What does it mean for me (and Freshwaters?) to really have a heart for the lost?

### Beyond the walls

- Church isn't a social club (though I enjoy the social aspect of it very much), it's a family. We care for one another, look out for one another – but that family extends beyond the walls of Freshwaters to the family of God, the Kingdom of God – believers, non-believers and not-quite-there-yet-believers.
- As a church, we're starting to consider the Kingdom of God, what that means (and doesn't mean) and what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God.
- Our inclination in terms of church and Kingdom citizenship is to want to know who's in and who's out, but I've been challenged recently to think of church and 'belonging' as going beyond the walls of the building, beyond scheduled meetings.
- Now, there's nothing new in that, churches, including Freshwaters, have been reaching out to the community for a long time. But for me, the new challenge, is whether we consider people to be part of the church, part of Freshwaters, before they believe.

- Before Mum moved to Harlow, she would come to Freshwaters whenever she was staying with us – even before she was a Christian. I think we’d all agree that Mum is part of Freshwaters now, but was she part of Freshwaters before she believed? Did she become part of Freshwaters when she gave her life to Jesus? Or was it when she moved to Harlow and started coming regularly? Or maybe it wasn’t until she became a member or was baptised?
- What do we think of Ellie, David and Danielle who come regularly to Messy Church? Do we consider them to be part of Freshwaters?
- What do we think of the people at Rainbow and Rainbow Extra? Do we consider them to be part of Freshwaters? Are we more comfortable thinking of those who are having some ‘formal’ input, whether that be via Messy Church or Rainbow Extra, as maybe being sort of a part of Freshwaters, perhaps on the fringes – but those who only go to the social aspect of Rainbow not to be a part?
- I’m not here to give you any answers, but to make you think, to challenge our view of ‘church’ and whether we can really say that people are ‘in’ or ‘out’.
- Jesus encourages us to mix with and influence those who do not yet follow Him:

Matthew 13:33

*“The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”*

- As the whole loaf is affected by a tiny amount of yeast mixed into the enormous batch of dough, so where Christ is preached and taught, the whole society around should be affected – but not if they don’t hear it; if we don’t let others in or don’t go out to where they are, we are not mixing the yeast in with the dough – and the loaf won’t rise!! God’s Kingdom won’t expand.
- The metaphor Jesus uses emphasises the all-pervasive influence of the Kingdom. Pervasive means universal, inescapable, persistent, omnipresent, widespread, extensive – the influence of God’s Kingdom should be all of these things. It should be everywhere, all the time.
- But where (or I should say ‘who’) does that influence come from? From us – believers and followers of Jesus. We have more influence than we think; we may not see it, but if we carry the truth within us and live it out in this world, then we are a force for the Kingdom.
- We need to influence our community.

### Throw out the nets!

Matthew 13:47-50

*“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, throwing the wicked into the furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

- When a fisherman uses a huge dragnet, it pulls up everything. It can be a great way to get what the fisherman is looking for, but it gets a lot more too! When the catch is pulled in, that isn’t the end of the process – the contents of the net then has to be sorted: the good fish are kept, the bad fish are thrown back.
- It can make us uncomfortable to think of Jesus categorising human beings as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but not everyone becomes fit for the Kingdom.
- Some of us are drawn in, towards Jesus, and accept His truth. He then transforms us, shaping us for Kingdom life.
- Others, however, don’t accept Him and don’t allow Him to shape them for His realm.

- The Bible clearly states that Jesus will make distinctions when He returns:

Matthew 13:49

*“The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous...”*

Matthew 24:30-31, 40-41

*“And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send out His angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather His chosen ones from all over the world – from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven... Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken the other left.”*

- There is no doubt that distinctions will be made when Jesus returns. But, in the meantime, He urges us to make the nets full – to catch fish (people) of every kind. It is not our job to sort them – we don’t make the distinction between who’s ‘in’ or who’s ‘out’.
- We are called to offer Kingdom blessings to everyone – even those who don’t believe, even those who are hostile to Christians and Christianity and reject Jesus, even if they will benefit and give nothing in return.
- God doesn’t show favouritism with His generosity – we are no more His favourites than the unsaved, than the hostile.
- He offers His generosity universally, but even then, not everyone is drawn to Him – BUT THAT’S NOT OUR RESPONSIBILITY!!
- We can’t offer God’s goodness to believers and hold non-believers at a distance – we are sent to this world to not only share the good news of the gospel to non-believers but also with a heart that shows God’s goodness to everyone – regardless of their beliefs.
- In the Great Commission, we aren’t given a checklist of who we shouldn’t bother trying to share the gospel with. Jesus says, *“Go and make disciples of **all** the nations...”* (Matthew 28:19).
- We aren’t supposed to keep people out of the net (you don’t belong, you can’t come in), we are meant to draw everyone in and trust Jesus to sort it later.
- This brings us back to what we consider to be ‘church’, ‘Freshwaters’... Do we trust God enough to let people in even if we don’t agree with their lifestyle and beliefs? What if someone is addicted to gambling or drugs? Can they come in? What if a homosexual couple who believe in Jesus walk through the door? Can they come in? Who are those people groups or individuals that make us feel uncomfortable, that we may consider as being ‘out’, or who we’re just not sure whether they’re ‘in’ or ‘out’? In the New Testament, the tax collectors were among those considered to be the lowest of the low – who are our modern day ‘tax collectors’?
- I’ll say it again: we aren’t supposed to keep people out of the net. We draw them in, and trust Jesus to sort it later. It’s how He’s chosen to grow His Kingdom on earth. And it’s how we join Him in His work.
- Most of us are probably comfortable with the notion of us going out to them (or ‘Christians’ going out to them, if not ‘us’ personally), but are we prepared to let them come in to us? To share our lives, share our space, maybe disrupt our schedules, our plans...?
- I find this a challenge myself – wanting to be comfortable is part of who I am: I like to look nice, but my primary aim when buying clothes is comfort; I don’t like extremes of heat or cold – I like to be just right; I don’t like crowds of people – they make me feel uncomfortable; I don’t like heights – I’m not comfortable with the fact that if I fall it’s going to hurt! We all have ‘comfort zones’ in different areas of our lives – I think God may be about to challenge our ‘church comfort zone’.

## Culture of Truth

2 Timothy 4:1-5

*I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when He appears to set up His Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favourable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.*

- Do you think we might be coming into that time when people no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching, and reject truth?
- Some say we are living in a 'post-truth' society – a society where the borders between truth and lies are blurred; where it's expected that people will pad out their CVs, that it's ok to tell lies – you have your truth, and I'll have mine – but don't tell me that my truth is wrong!
- We need to know what the truth of the gospel is, and we need to be prepared to share it.
- We need to keep a clear mind in every situation – inside and outside of church meetings – to know right from wrong, truth from deception.
- We need to be prepared to declare that truth – not sit on the fence, being wishy-washy. We need to know what we believe and be ready to share it when God prompts us to – and it might be in the most unlikely place at the most inconvenient time, with the most disagreeable person!
- But will we do it? With someone we know and have been praying for, maybe...but with the vague acquaintance? The neighbour? The stranger?

## Conclusion

- Three strands:
  - Beyond the walls: who belongs? Widening our idea of what belonging to Freshwaters means?
  - Throw out the nets: gather ALL in – Jesus decides who's 'in' and who's 'out'.
  - Culture of Truth: we need to be certain of what we believe – sitting on the fence is no longer an option – be prepared to share that truth.

## Response

- I've listened to loads of talks about reaching out to the lost – much better ones than this one! But they still didn't make a long-term difference to me and my attitude – I needed an impartation from God for that!
- Break my heart for what breaks Yours...think carefully before you sing or pray that – you might get a surprise – I did!!