

Happenings at Balham: April 2016

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. Matthew 25:41-43 (NIV)

The context for the passage must not be missed. In Matthew 24, Jesus was preparing people for his second coming by sharing signs of his coming. He then told a parable about the Ten Virgins, all who had a measure of faith in God but some lacked the Holy Spirit. Then continuing the theme, he suggested that one way to distinguish between those who professed to be believers and those who were true and faithful was how they treated other people. However there is no suggestion that works will be our passage to the Kingdom. In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus talks about another group who did many wonderful things but clearly did not know Jesus. The distinction between the two groups is descriptive, one cared about the needy and one didn't. Although both claimed to know Jesus, only group one demonstrated this knowledge through their actions.

It is interesting how many people who don't claim to be Christians but do charitable things and in many cases are totally committed to helping mankind. So what about us who claim to follow Christ? Shouldn't there be something to propel us to go even further than non-Christians in our pursuit to help others?

In the parable from the opening verse, those who were cursed into eternal fire were not labeled as adulterers or murderers but those who had not reacted to the plight of the needy. The Apostle John asked the poignant question in 1 John 3:17 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need and has no pity in him, how can the love of God be in him?'

Ouch! We can say what we want but if we fail to help someone in need, and we are in a position to do so, John questions whether we have the love of God in us. James goes even further in James 2:15-16 when he says 'Suppose a brother is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?'

Straight talk indeed! We may know what to say, and are excellent at discussions, but if we don't do anything to help someone then it's just hot air, and what good is that? This is not a call to feel guilty but a call for prayer so that God can fill us with his love so we can be naturally giving to those we can help.

As a church we are about to go into a period we call Ingathering, where through door-to-door collecting or other pursuits, we aim to help those in need. It's a shame that Ingathering leaders often feel they have to beg us to get involved. Helping someone should be as natural to us as barking is to a dog. We may not like doing it, but most of us didn't like eating our greens when we were growing up, however we were told they were good for us! Well helping others is good for us, as well as for them.

May I repeat a previous point, our motivation should not be to earn our way to heaven; we could never muster up enough money to do so anyway, but because we are driven by an inner desire and love for those who have been put in our way for us to help. Maybe our prayer should be 'Lord put within me a heart of compassion and a willingness to be used to help someone in need'.

There is a phrase that is sometimes heard, namely, 'Charity begins at home'. It's often used as an excuse not to help others outside our immediate catchment areas or associations. I have never seen that phrase in the Bible so anyone that we can help, whether here or abroad, we should make the sacrifice to do so.

We can probably think of other reasons not to get take part in Ingathering - we don't like begging for money, we are not confident all the money will reach the poor or we have more pressing things to do! However, I believe there is a far more overwhelming reason to get involved and it's that someone needs our help and we may just be that person God wants to use, not only to bless him or her, but also to receive the blessings God has for us.

Looking back at March 2016

March was very much a month of prayer. It started off with a Women's Day of Prayer and ended with a Youth Week of Prayer. The youth programme involved a week of inspiring messages by Stephen Fuller and a packed Divine Service to end the week.

Outreach continues to play a key role in our church life and this month we presented gifts to the mothers in our community to celebrate Mother's Day and launched our annual charity fundraising drive for ADRA-UK. We were also involved in our monthly street-witnessing venture and one person gave their life to Christ in baptism.

Our Communion Service had an added dimension as a deaf-ministries group ministered to us. Finally Balham Church was the venue for a SEC Worship Leader's Conference. This attracted people from all over the South of England and focused on how to make our services more effective and gain a better appreciation of what worship is.

Key Dates for your diary (April 2016)

Sabbath 2nd April: Ordination of Elders

During Divine service, we will dedicate some time to ordaining some of our Elders for further ministry in God's church.

Sabbath 9th April: Prayer and Fasting

We will devote this Sabbath to Prayer and Fasting, which will include a special programme after Divine Service. At 3pm we will break our fast with a light meal of soup, bread rolls, fruits and nuts.

ADRA-UK Ingathering campaign continues up to 17th April

Through door-to-door collection, direct giving or other fundraising activities, we will be raising money for our annual charity appeal. Please see www.adra.org.uk

Sabbath 23rd April: Stewardship Day

How can we manage the resources of money, time and talents that God has given us more effectively? We will attempt to answer this during this special day.

Sunday 24th April: Community Health Expo @ 11am

Features include health talks, GP consultations, juicing and a healthy- eating café.

Sabbath 30th April - Music Day

This is always one of the most exciting days in the church calendar and I'm sure this will be no exception as we praise God through music and songs.

Sabbath 30th April: ADRA-UK Fundraising concert @ 6.30pm

As part of our fundraising drive, we will hold a concert as we did last year to raise funds for the needy in UK and round the world.