

Coach House Church BEACONS

SELF PRESERVATION

12TH AUGUST 2020

Now today, I'm feeling a little nostalgic. One of the films that used to be a staple diet of Christmas telly when I was a kid was the original 'The Italian job', not the later remake, but the 1969 Michael Caine classic with the minis racing through the sewers of Turin in Italy, full of gold bullion, before transferring to a coach which is left hanging off the side of a cliff when the coach skids off a mountain road! All very improbable (certainly given the weight of gold bullion bars), but great escapism and a must watch whenever it came round (which it did most years I seem to remember)

A song that was the theme for the gold bullion thieves was 'We are the self-preservation society' – you will never know how tempting that was to sing – but I'll spare you that!

In this beacon and I want to take a little time to think about self-preservation. 'The act of keeping yourself safe, or alive, in a dangerous situation' is how the dictionary defines it, and we act in self-preservation almost naturally every single day without even thinking about it.

Why do I think this – well, because it's a dangerous world in which we live, and in order to live in the world we have to manage our way through it avoiding the dangers – self-preservation in a nutshell!

This is perhaps especially true in the period of time we find ourselves now. Wearing masks, keeping distance from one another, avoiding unnecessary contact – these are all actions that we have undertaken in order to maintain safety and health – self-preservation.

In a previous role I had in my work, I looked after various countries in Southern Europe – before you get too excited, I wasn't some kind of super diplomat – although my kids did think I was a spy! I was simply looking after the sales areas for my company and training the representatives in Turkey, Spain and Italy. My job would mean me disappearing from home late Sunday evenings to fly to Milan, Istanbul or Madrid or some other airport in the region, and then reappearing at home later in the week. Melanie remembers one week that Matthew, our youngest, asked her one day if she knew where dad was. 'in Italy' was the reply. 'when did he go there?' asked Matthew. '3 days ago!' came the reply. Now I don't know whether this is particularly good or not...was I missed, or wasn't I? Anyway, I digress.

The reason for telling you about my weekly flights, is that it didn't matter what airline I flew with, what country I was flying to, or what time of the day or week I took the flight...they all had one thing in common. No aircraft could take to the sky without first doing the onboard safety checks – you know, the one where the flight attendant points out the emergency exits etc.

One of the things that is pointed out during these demonstrations, is what to do if oxygen masks are required. The instruction given is always to put on your own mask before attempting to help anyone else... if you think about it, this makes perfect sense. To be of use to someone else in this situation, you have to be in a position and able to assist and this means making sure that you need to implement self-preservation first.

In the Bible, God set aside the people of Israel in order that might be an example to the nations around of how faithful and powerful God is. All this is well and good, until the example of the people doesn't reflect well on God who preserves them...and then trouble comes knocking!

One thing we see over and over again is that man goes his own way time and time again. God is pushed aside and the new worldview becomes look after number 1 but stripped of all reason.

Now I can agree with self-preservation, but have an issue with looking after number 1 and that number 1 being me, especially when I consider who I really am! The Bible gives a lot of time to showing a correct view of ourselves and a correct view of God and you will not be surprised to know that it is very different to the world view that surrounds us.

The Bible clearly states that we should put God first – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength – It is the foremost commandment in the entire scope of God's word.

In the New Testament, Jesus distils this even further and announces, when questioned by an expert in Jewish law, that the entire demands of the law and prophets can be met if you : 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbour as yourself' (if you are wondering these words of Jesus can be found in Matthew 22 v 37 and they are reiterated by Paul in his letter to the Romans chapter 13 v 9-10) Self-preservation therefore becomes very dependent on our view of God in the life equation.

Without God, we will be self-seeking, looking to further our own standing and welfare, but with God as our first and foremost focus, we will look to further others in the same way that we look after ourselves.

So why does having our focus on God, shift our perspective so much?

The bible speaks very clearly about the standards that God upholds – His purity and righteousness. It also makes it clear that if we were to measure ourselves against this, we would fall woefully short. All the good we could ever do in our lives, pails into nothingness when exposed to the glory of God.

In part, this is why God sent Jesus to live a pure sinless life and then die on our behalf. It is strange that our self-preservation is totally dependent on Jesus extreme sacrifice and obedience. We are only in a position where we can look after ourselves and one another because Jesus made a way for us to change our direction. He offered us life instead of death.

If you like, in our aircraft scenario, He offers us the oxygen air mask, after first, providing the way for us to be saved from certain death and then giving us access to something better altogether. .

There is a lot of symbolism in the bible, but nothing stands out more than that Jesus laid down his life, he was prepared to die for us, so that we could be rescued from death and given life for eternity.

Jesus rose from death, he conquered the one thing, that perhaps holds us in greatest fear, and in doing so , showed that there is more to life than , well.....this life!

So, I do believe in self-preservation, but perhaps not in the way that it is usually talked about. My life is only worth preserving because I have something to live for, something to offer to others, something that reflects my new relationship with God. Anything else is worthless and while it may seem like all is going well, if the final destination hasn't been considered, then what is it we are self -preserving for? Paul uses the argument when he writes to the churches in the New Testament, that the law that God has handed down to his people, only offers a chance to see how far away we are from achieving His standards. But he does this in order to offer a solution to the conundrum. You cannot meet the standard but Jesus can, and more to the point did!

God provided and then accepted the sacrifice on our behalf and then more than that, gave us Jesus righteousness as a new covering – a covering which hides all the faults and badness that keeps us separated from God (The bible calls it sin) – in other words, that which separated us is now hidden from site and covered by the sacrifice of Jesus – giving us access to God again. God preserves us by giving of himself first. He makes the first move.

As for the Italian jobs -Self-preservation society - well actually this is a very misleading viewpoint. There self-preservation left then teetering on a cliff edge with nothing to show for all their efforts.

Jesus offers us the greatest deal in history ever. Believe and live. Now _____ that is worth preserving.



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