

Coach House Church BEACONS

WILL THEY? WONT THEY?

7TH DECEMBER 2020

Hi everyone and welcome to this December beacon. I trust that you keeping safe and well in this Christmas season.

It seems that many have taken to putting up Christmas decorations well before the start of December in order to bring some cheer in these strange times, where we cannot be together as much as we would like. 2020 has been a struggle for many and it is as if the bright sparkle of fairy lights somehow dispels the gloom and paves the way for new beginnings.

I must admit that I love the freshness of a real tree and mine was in place mid-November, although it took until the start of December to start the process of dressing it and hanging the lights.

Having a cold conservatory where we have the tree in place, means the tree lasts right the way through into January without any problems and there is nothing better than the scent of pine we get, every time we open the doors to turn the lights on and off. It certainly gives the home a feel of Christmas and a cosiness that helps to banish the miserable weather and shifts our thoughts away from the sometimes-overwhelming news around us.

Now, I'm not sure about you, but the decorating of the tree has a hint of routine about it.

The boxes come out of the loft space where they have stored the decorations and tinsel, ready to be carefully unpacked and arranged on the tree. The biggest issue most years and the thing that brings about the point of stress is the annual question.... will the lights work, or won't they?

I know that you have all done the same thing. Plug the lights in, turn on the socket and hope that you are greeted by the comforting twinkle of lights as the string bursts into life ready to be deployed on the waiting tree. It's always a gamble isn't it. They worked when they were packed away last year, but will they have survived another year?

More modern technology and the use of LED lights has lessened this concern somewhat and lights are far more robust than they used to be.

One way of removing the annual gamble I suppose, is to keep the lights out all year, and in fact, because of the move to LED technology, we and a lot of others do just that, with lights in bedrooms, conservatory and around the garden, maintaining a cosy homely feel all year round. If you have been to a Jackson bonfire, you will be aware of the lights twinkling around you whatever time of year it is.

And I suppose that is the point of this beacon. As Christians we would be foolish to put all of our hope in an annual plug in. The bible tells us that we will all stand before God in order to face judgement:

2 Timothy 4:1 (NLT)

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes 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.

So, in this passage, the Apostle Paul is teaching a young man called Timothy, who is being trained up to lead and help the church in Ephesus

The church is evidently having some problems with false teachers coming in and leading the new believers in Jesus into wrong behaviours.

Paul urges Timothy throughout the 2 letters that he wrote to him to maintain a continuous lifestyle, centred on Jesus that he could then pass on to the Ephesian church to encourage them to live up to Gods standard every day.

Throughout scripture we can see that a relationship with God through Jesus, is a daily commitment, a life change and one which has an assurance of eternity because of it.

A lifestyle that does not reflect a relationship with Jesus, is a bit like taking the chance that a brief understanding or even one-time commitment, is enough to help you gain eternity in God's presence once the call to stand before Him on judgement day appears. Will the lights work when I plug them in after ignoring them for a year? Will my neglected relationship that I have ignored be enough to gain me salvation?

Paul goes further when he speaks to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2

2 Timothy 2:16 (NLT)

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

And this is because: Paul continues

2 Timothy 2:19 (NLT)

... God's truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription: "The LORD knows those who are His," and "All who belong to the LORD must turn away from evil."

I think the language shows that the lifestyle we must live is one that is continuous ... work hard to present yourself ...be a good worker ... All who belong to the Lord must turn away from evil.

Whenever I walked through my garden to the fire pit where we would have our bonfires, I would often bang my head on a branch of the wisteria which had wound itself around our pergola over the pathway.

Not long ago it was decided that we needed to replace the rotting Pergola that had been in place for over 18 years. When first built, the pergola had been strong and robust, but as years passed by, we didn't maintain it properly and things began to change.

I suppose it began when we planted the small wisteria plant nearby it. As its straggly stems began to form, they found the pergola 4" x 4" uprights the perfect place to bend around and reach upwards towards the sun.

Going almost unnoticed the spindly stem began to find support and establish itself. The stem was wiry and weak but it grew steadily upwards wrapping itself around the uprights until it found the top of the uprights and began to branch out quickly over the roof crossmembers.

As the stem grew longer and stretched out, the roots of the Wisteria became strong and deep, feeding the stem which began to thicken and entwine around the pergola.

10 years later this small Wisteria had grown stronger and its stems had thickened around the pergola uprights, until eventually they were the only thing keeping the pergola upright. The pergola wood had been strangled and taken over by the Wisteria - there was no alternative but to replace the pergola and leave the old uprights in the grip of the thick wisteria.

There was no saving the original pergola, we had to cut it out and start again.

Once we had finished only one part of the original pergola survives ... well, I say survives: It just cannot be cut out from in between the coils of the thick wisteria plant and it remains today, a thick piece of 4" x 4" timber held firmly in the grip of the thickly coiled wisteria stem.

Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

1 ... let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Sin easily entangles we are told in Hebrews 12 v 1 and we need to get rid of it before it reaches such an extent that it controls us and we cannot escape from its grip.

There is a story about a circus performer who used a baby python in his act, allowing it to wrap itself around him before escaping from its coils. Crowds would gather to watch the circus performer with his python, always managing to escape from it after it had wrapped itself around him.

One day the crowds had gathered to watch the act. The performer allowed the python to wrap itself around him and the crowds waited for him to wriggle free from its grip. But the python had grown and the performer found that he could not move the coils to free himself. The grip got tighter and tighter until eventually the performer's spine snapped which led to his death.

Sin starts off small, but if we allow it to take a hold, we can be enslaved to it and unable to escape its vice like grip.

God recognises that we cannot escape our sinful lives ourselves, so He provided Jesus to become the payment for sin, so that we can escape the consequences - death.

However, sin still 'crouches at the door', waiting for the opportunity to ensnare us again.

2 Peter 2 v 20 warns us that even when we have been set free from the power over sin in our lives, we can still succumb to it.

2 Peter 2:17 (NLT)

For you are a slave to whatever controls you. And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command, they were given to live a holy life.

This Christmas time, I urge you to place your trust in the Lord Jesus, who came to make full and acceptable sacrifice for all our sins. And then, live a life continuously worthy of the payment Jesus has made on your behalf.

Learn to live in this lifestyle every day, giving thanks to God for Jesus.

Why take the risk of seeing if your lights will work once a year? Keep them burning brightly every day, being careful to keep sin at bay.

I wish you a peaceful Christmas.... and I hope your lights work first time!



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