

Coach House Church BEACONS

ARE YOU COMING HOME?

16TH JULY 2021

I find this a very difficult Beacon to write. It's the morning after the Euros final – England against Italy.

I'm in a strange emotional state, floating between the reality of a normal day and the despair of the emotional rollercoaster of the night before. I will suddenly feel myself getting quite depressed and have to shake myself from it. As I look down on the traffic from the church office window, I can see from the level of road traffic that there are quite a few people 'missing' from their normal journey to work. Maybe it's a delayed start or the taking of holidays (or in these strange times a ping from an app telling them to isolate for 10 days!!) ... whatever the reason, it is strangely quiet and an aura of disappointment is tangible.

For those of you unaware of the football match on Sunday night, England had progressed to the finals with a brilliant team effort, which had actually raised the nations hopes of seeing England actually go on to win a major competition. We (that is England) had worked together as a team, the manager had put together a young squad, that it can be argued had no major 'single figure' around which everything revolved – we looked good, it felt good – surely this was our opportunity?

Now, I'm not the greatest of football tacticians or even punditry, but it was obvious that something changed as I was watching the game. I couldn't put my finger on it, but something changed between the first half and the second.

The first half was a whirlwind of attacking, probing and dominance from the England side. It resulted in a goal after two minutes It should have been two before the ten-minute mark, as England played with no fear and dominated the Italians. The Italians looked stunned and England were on course to win the trophy.

Then things changed. The second half was a total reversal and England lost their advantage. What I had seen was borne out by an Italian reporter the next morning. He was rightfully jubilant after seeing Italy win the game on penalties, but he expressed the same observations:

'England were frightening in the first half and Italy did not know what to do against the fearless attack. England struck early and in fact should have gone on to win the game easily in the first half, if they had pressed home their attack – but they didn't and

seemed to become defensive ,SOMETHING CHANGED. I don't know why, but suddenly England became defensive and stopped attacking, they dropped deep allowing Mancini (Italy's manager) to make a few tweaks to the organisation and from then on in, England were beaten'.

Now, I don't want this beacon to be just about football, and as I reflect upon the game, I am brought back to this strange emotion of losing out....

That euphoria as England scored after two minutes, I could liken to the time I first became a Christian. There was this joy and indescribable feeling of being something I was meant to be.

That first half was like my early Christian days – I was unstoppable, on the attack, fervent in everything I did. I was on top of the world and nothing was going to stop me fulfilling my destiny.

Then things began to change, perhaps slowly at first. Life begins to change around me, perhaps complacency crept in, it may even be that I slipped back into my old ways? Maybe the mistakes started to mount up? Perhaps I just thought that I had already won and I stopped pushing hard? Perhaps I simply took my eye off the ball. Whatever it was, that first excitement and urgency got replaced with a routine and stagnancy that was only realised I was in when it was too late. I would try and get going, return to what I knew was achievable, but somehow, I couldn't get there.

I suppose the analogy of allowing myself to be wrapped in a cotton thread turn by turn comes in handy here. The first strand is easily broken, and perhaps we do break free from it time after time, but eventually two or three strands get wrapped around ... I can still break free but I am allowing more and more strands to be added.

Eventually, when it is too late, I realise that enough strands have been wrapped around that the combined strength is greater than the strength I have to break it. and now I'm in trouble. My strength is not enough.....

...and there it is. My strength is not enough, so God graciously gives of himself again, in the Holy Spirit to help us when in the journey.... we are not alone; we are part of a 'team'.

All through the New Testament, the Apostles (the eye witnesses to Jesus's life, death and resurrection) encouraged the 1st century church to keep hold of their faith (in Jesus) and to be careful in guarding against losing what has been gained. For example, Paul says to Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:16

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

And perhaps here is the key: there is an active response required to watch closely the way we live and to adhere to the truth of God's word, that reveals His love for us and the way to salvation. The sacrifice of Jesus, paid for all our wrongdoing.

1 Timothy 1: 18-19

"May they help you fight well in the Lord's battles. Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked".

Now, this seems pretty clear to me, that Paul is letting it be known that some have 'shipwrecked their faith' due to returning to their old ways and 'violating their conscience' in doing so. In other words, they knew right from wrong and chose wrong anyway! The Holy Spirit – our helper – shows us the right way, but we choose to respond or reject.

I pray that we recognise when we have stopped paying close attention quickly and act before it is too late. Just as the crowd at Wembley were urging on their team, we also are urged to keep going and to reach the finish. As the clock ticked towards 90 minutes the tension grew and grew. No-one wanted the lottery of penalties – but someone had to take hold of the trophy

I'm reminded that a football game has an end (whether it be 90 minutes, 120 minutes or the last penalty kick) – ultimately – IT WILL END. The Bible tells us the same sentiment. We are rapidly heading towards the final whistle in our lives. There will come an end. The Bible also reveals the end of the earth and the new beginning with those that have made it to the finish line with faith in Jesus intact.

We are currently looking at the Apostle Peter's letters to the church, and we see the same urgency and warning:

2 Peter 3: 10

But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment. The battle cry of England's euro journey has been 'it's coming home', so I suppose the question for all of us is 'are you coming home?'

God wants all of His creation to know the truth and have the opportunity to have their sins forgiven. He has made the way open to us through sending Jesus as payment for our sins, but we have to take hold of the gift, utilise the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us and see us through to the finish line which we all have ahead of us.

God has promised us a life ever after, but we choose to take hold or reject today. The final whistle is too late to do anything about what comes after - Glory or despair.

The time is ticking and the urgency is building. Are you coming home? And are you helping others join you?



Coach House Church

222 Wellington Road North, Stockport, SK4 2QN
leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604
Registered charity in England and Wales - 1194822



Pastor Andy Jackson
Pastor // Trustee
andyj@coachhousechurch.org