



If you've been following our Sunday service messages over the last 2 weeks, hopefully you feel well-equipped for our current lockdown, even though it was a surprise announcement on Wednesday.

It just so happened that I've been speaking on keeping up with 'The Basics' and being, 'The wisest people on earth'. Both messages are very relevant at this time and I encourage you to put them into action.

When facing sudden or unexpected change, it's quite normal to feel disorientated, anxious, or just unsure what to do because our normal daily routines and connections are disrupted. So, keep up with the wisdom of sticking to the basics.

And to help in our current pandemic lockdown, here are a few reminders of things that will help with our mental and emotional health, and then talk about the foundation of our well-being, peace and our confidence.

I've mentioned in recent months, that we are being bombarded and swamped with information, debates and 'noise'... And now that we're in another outbreak, we're back to constant updates on CoVID case numbers, places of interest, and alert levels. It's important to remember:

Information is good; overload is not. Know your limit.

- If you're always feeling you need to check the latest news report and the latest government briefing and the latest case numbers etc., you're either a journalist, or you're probably *fixated* on pandemic information. It's good to stay up to



date with the major announcements, but if you feel *compelled* to check throughout the day, you're probably being motivated more by fear, than by practical need; and the tree of fear provides no good fruit.

I like to check in on some of the pandemic information, but I know I need to limit that, otherwise I feel discouraged or overwhelmed. Keep checking how you're *feeling* about the information you're hearing. If you're only feeling *more* worried, afraid, or discouraged, you've gone over your information limit: you're in **information overload**.

Recognise your limit and reinforce that limit.

Interestingly, in Ecclesiastes 1:18, the wisest man on earth, when reviewing all he had learned in life, wrote: *'the more knowledge, the more grief'*.

Knowledge or information, can be good, but avoid information overload.

Also, if you have children, protect them from the *alarms* and 'heavy' nature of pandemic information. Remember that nearly all the information being broadcast on TV and online, is for adults, not children. Children only need to know the headlines of *what to do* and *not to do*, and why. Don't hide them from information because of fear; but do limit how *much* they hear, and keep them focussed on the reality of all they have and can do today – the things within their control.

Remember to apply your **well-being basics**.

1. When in lock-down, **stay connected** with people over the phone, or online. One piece of unfortunate language used during the pandemic is 'social-distancing'. You should definitely **physically distance** from people not in your bubble, but you shouldn't distance from people socially – **keep socially connected and physically distanced**. Isolation is the most dangerous disease of all.
2. **Don't be afraid of emotions.** You'll feel different things at different times. Don't panic or react to some of the feelings you don't like. Recognise them, accept that they're a normal part of what comes with sudden change or loss, and guide yourself back to things that bring peace. If you find some emotions dominate your thinking, then be wise and pick up the phone and talk to someone.

3. Keep up with healthy routines...even if you have to start new ones.



For those who are usually out at work, or classes, or community programmes, your routines may have suddenly been lost. This causes disorientation, so you need to take some time to re-orientate yourself. Figure out what you want to be doing at this time, and set a routine for it. E.g. A regular exercise time; regular work times; regular break times; regular play times; regular contact with others time; regular time in God's

Word, etc. It's easy to get to the end of the day, feeling a bit lost, and unsure what you did with your day. Don't let that be your default, instead, set a routine and use it well. Each day can be a good day if you *make* it a good day.

- 4. Stick to the Lockdown rules.** They are important for protecting all of us, and getting our country on top of the Delta virus. Also, sticking to the lockdown rules provides a greater sense of security and freedom, knowing that you're doing the right things and if anything did go wrong, you can be confident about your integrity, with nothing to hide. If you've been alarmed by others saying that it's a violation of our freedom, head back to scriptures and you'll see a different kind of attitude being promoted to those set free in Jesus Christ. Scriptures like, Romans 13:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:11-17 and Galatians 5:13 that says: *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* Locking ourselves down is how we serve one another humbly in love. We're locking down for the benefit of all NZ'ers.

At this time, remember also, those who are still working away from home, and those who have to work full-time from home. Lockdowns mean different things, for different people. We're not all sunbathing, movie watching, and enjoying nature walks! Check in on those who are still at work – they can often feel left out, or overworked, or unsafe due to the level of exposure they may be working in. Or they may just feel that it's a bit unfair, that while they work, so many others are enjoying time off. Pray for and reach out to them, to encourage and thank them for what they do for the rest of us.

Now, along with these basics, I want to remind you of the truth that you've been brought into, through Jesus Christ. Keep your life fixed firmly on this foundation of the Gospel, in whatever circumstance you face. It's easy to get submerged under the waves of drama, crises, and noise in the world today.

In the letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul reminds us to give joyful thanks to our Heavenly Father:

'who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves'... Colossians 1:12-13



Isaiah 60 says to us:

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Isaiah 60:1-2

Remember that in Jesus Christ, you've been rescued out of darkness, and into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, in which there is no darkness, only light. While we're still on this earth, we must face dark times and are surrounded by the darkness common to all people. But if you're in Jesus Christ, you're not IN the dark, and darkness isn't over us.

The Apostle John, when explaining how Jesus existed at the time the heavens and the earth were created, said:

⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:4-5

It's so important to remember the eternal Kingdom we have already been brought *into*, and the darkness we have been rescued *out of*!

You can read about the darkness, you can hear the news about the darkness, you can even see it at work in the world around you. But **you're not in darkness**. Your life and destiny is only one of light.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died [that is, to your old form of life], and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Col 3:1-3

It's hidden, because your life is secured in and with Jesus who is in heaven, and therefore, people on earth can't see it. They can't see this hope that you have, this relationship you have with God, this light of life that you possess in Christ. It's 'hidden' from the world. That's why we're urged to not set our hearts and minds on earthly things.

What matters and what lasts, is what is eternal and that is secured for us by Jesus Christ, who is seated above *all* things.



Nothing on earth can steal your hope, or extinguish your light, or change the truth about who Jesus is, and who you are in and through Him.

The Apostle Paul, who wrote the letter to the Colossians we just read from, is a good example of someone who lived in and *from* the light he had discovered in Jesus Christ. He didn't start that way though...

Paul started life with the name, Saul.

Saul, you could say, was an honours student in the highly respected Pharisee school of Gamaliel. Saul's father was a Pharisee too.

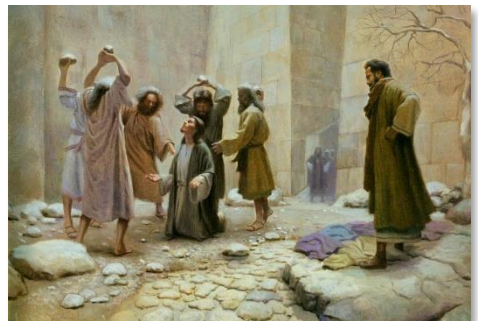
The Pharisees were a religious sect that believed in excelling in both, knowing in detail the 613 Jewish laws of Moses, and also living out those laws in the strictest sense. You could describe them as lawyers of the laws of God, who disciplined their every activity to live out those laws.

They would memorise them, teach them to others, and even accuse or press charges against those who failed in living according to the religious laws and the many ceremonies, traditions, and customs associated with them.

In Jesus day, to be a Pharisee was to be an expert in the Jewish religious laws, highly revered, and above reproach. Saul's father was a Pharisee and had Saul trained as a Pharisee by Gamaliel, the most revered teacher of the Pharisees.

The first time we read of Saul in the scriptures, we find that it's in relation to the laws of God that he was so zealously committed. He was standing in support of the public execution of Stephen, a follower of Jesus of Nazareth.

Saul didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah or Christ, that scriptures had foretold. Instead, he believed Jesus was an imposter, a fraud and someone who was corrupting Jewish people, leading



them away from the perfect laws of the Old Testament. Saul wanted everyone who followed Jesus or revered his name, to be locked up, and in the case of Stephen, Saul supported his execution by a religious mob. You might even describe Saul as an 'extremist'.

Saul himself recounts his story in Acts 22 when he speaks to a crowd of Jews in Jerusalem:

³ *"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.*

[Why? Because they followed and believed in Jesus.]

⁶ *"About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul!*

Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

⁸ *"Who are you, Lord?' I asked.*

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰ *"What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.*

"Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into

Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹² *"A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.*

Acts 22

So, this Saul, a worshipper of God, a man committed to righteousness and to doing everything God's laws required, thought he was entirely secure, right, living in the light of his religious belief.

But in one brief moment, the true light of Jesus glory, revealed that he was in fact, walking in darkness. Although he had the holy scriptures and worshipped God, the Spirit of life and the light of the world had not entered

his heart. For a number of days, Saul refused to eat or drink, and he was blind – no light entered his world. Saul, a religious zealot and expert, was in utter darkness.

But when Ananias arrived and laid his hands upon Saul, he was filled with the Holy Spirit – light entered his spirit, and he was changed forever. From that point on, he overflowed with love for Jesus and couldn't help but tell people about the light and life of Jesus. In fact, he was so influential in telling people about the life he found in Jesus, it angered some Jewish zealots who then conspired to assassinate him. For the rest of Paul's life, he had people hunting him, beating him, conspiring against him, and ridiculing him, because he just couldn't keep quiet about the true life he had received in Jesus Christ.



In his own account he says: 2 Corinthians 11:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.

²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Paul saw darkness and even experienced dark times. He spent a large amount of his time imprisoned in chains, for preaching about Jesus. There would be very few people in NZ that could ever say they experienced the constant level of abuse and distress and danger and hardship that Paul experienced, year after year, after year. But as much as Paul saw and experienced darkness, he no longer belonged to it, he no longer lived under it, and no amount of darkness could snuff out or limit the light that he knew in Christ.

Instead, this same, suffering Apostle said:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4



Wherever you are today, whatever darkness you see in the world around you, remember that in Jesus Christ is a light that can never be dimmed; a peace that can never be extinguished, ...**if** you keep your hope and trust in Christ Jesus.

Paul also writes:

⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

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2 Corinthians 4

If you ever feel hard pressed, crushed, or struck down, remember that God has an eternal light He wants to shine in your hearts; a light that fuelled Paul's life through every hardship.

Live in the truth of this Good News, just as Paul did. Don't just have it filed in a notebook in your brain. Live from the light of that truth - live *in* it and *through* it. Paul calls it the light of the Gospel – Gospel, meaning the 'Good News' of Jesus Christ. That's what will secure your life in every storm and difficulty, and will flow through your life to others, giving them hope and light.

So be wise and be careful to keep your life and your perspective, illuminated with the light of the Gospel; not just for your own sake, but for the sake of others who need to hear this good news.

Very simply - Ephesians 2:4-7'

because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might display the surpassing riches of His grace, demonstrated by His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.'

Again, if you're in Jesus Christ, you already have eternal life, that's why Paul says we are seated with Christ in heavenly realms right now. And the term: 'In the coming ages' means that this life on earth, is only one age – there's another age to come. The current heaven and earth are only temporary – they will both pass away, because, just as God created the current heavens and the earth, we read that God has prepared *another* heaven and earth, that is far superior to this one. (Genesis 1 and Revelation 21).

That's what Jesus has saved us into. **Our hope isn't in this world!**



Therefore, plagues, wars and disasters don't diminish our hope – they only serve to REVEAL it! These remind us that this world is temporary and perishing; but we are destined to inherit a new and eternal world that is superior in every way. And everyone is invited to be part of it,

in and through Jesus Christ, who is the 'light of the world', the 'light of life'.

We're not in despair, because our eternal lives are hidden in Him, seated with Him in heavenly realms, and therefore outside of the reach of the problems and darkness of this world.

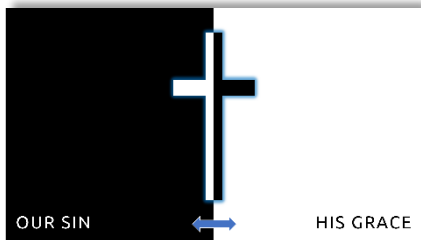
That's why the light of Paul's zeal, service, message and life, could never be dimmed by the suffering and persecution he experienced through most of his life on earth. Nothing here could touch his life secured by Jesus, held for Paul in heavenly places.

If you don't know such hope, if you don't know such light, if you don't know such eternal security, keep reading!

Paul goes on to write in Ephesians 2:8-10

'For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance as our way of life.'

Don't work at being good enough by your character and good works – that's not going to save you from the darkness and power of sin. Instead, Jesus took all our brokenness, shame, guilt, sin and hopelessness upon Himself. He carried it all to the cross, where He died for you. His death was *our* punishment being paid for in *his* body.



- There is no prison sentence, no fine, that could ever pay the price for dealing with our burden of sin.
- There is no medicine, vaccine or psychiatric skill that could ever fully heal our brokenness.
- There is no lamp, or sun, or LED that could bring light to our spiritual darkness.

Instead, God gifted His only Son, Jesus Christ to overcome and pay for our sin, brokenness, and darkness, so we could receive His life, healing, and light. Paul called that, **'grace'**.

'Grace' is something that is not worked for or deserved. It's the generous choice of the giver to freely give, regardless of the status of the recipient. Paul said that such saving grace comes through faith: you just **accept** that what Jesus did, was more than enough for you, and **receive** the light of that truth in your heart. Jesus has paid the price and made the exchange *already*. The gift has been paid for in full – now you unwrap that gift by faith, and live in and from the light of that Good News.

That's what happened to the man Saul, as he was busy with life, walking along the path to Damascus. Light shone around him and Jesus called to him. In one encounter, Saul's dark world was forever lit up with a hope and a truth that transformed his life for eternity. From that time on, he couldn't help but travel the world, talking about the light of the glorious hope he had received in Jesus Christ.

He knew why God had made him, he knew the work God had called him to, and his eternal identity and destiny was sealed forever!



Don't ever think that darkness has power over you. Turn on the light switch and remind yourself that it's the darkness that is terrified of light!

If you're a Christian, but have felt a bit shaken or overwhelmed with all the change and bad news in the world today, I trust this message has reminded you of the hope you already possess:

- Stay **clothed** in your eternal identity in Jesus Christ.
- Stay **aligned** to the hope He has already won for you.
- Stay **engaged** in the purpose and works He created you for.

People need to know the hope you have in Christ Jesus.

If you're not a Christian, or have fallen away from following Jesus in past years, I urge you to receive the gift God has given you in Jesus Christ. This world is broken, temporary and passing away. You were made to bring light in this world, *and* to inherit an eternal age to come. The same Jesus that called to Saul, is calling to you: follow Him.

"Heavenly Father, may your call, and your promise of light and life in your Kingdom, resound in every heart that is reading today. Help us to be wise and courageous in living in this hope and passing it on. We thank you that no darkness can keep us from your light. We thank you our hope is secure and eternal. Help us to know you and hear you at this time. Amen"

If you're new to this journey with Jesus Christ, please do contact us at Legacy Community Church so we can support you in your next steps in Jesus Christ.

God's peace and light be upon you.

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