

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

7 February 2021

Dear Friends,

This week we focus for a second Sunday on Christian mission around the world. Last week we joined BMS World Mission for their Day of Prayer. This week we support and pray for the work of The Leprosy Mission, whose theme this year comes from 1 John 4:19 'We love because he first loved us.' Last year, before the whole world went into crisis over the pandemic, we had a visit from Chris Stratta, Leprosy Mission Regional Manager for London and the South. Chris led our worship and shared with us stories of the hope and healing brought into people's lives through the work of The Leprosy Mission. Chris is not able to be with us in person this year, but he has recorded a sermon for us to listen to at our Sunday Morning Zoom service. Chris's message incorporates a short video hosted by Dame Darcey Bussell which launches The Leprosy Mission's Unconditional Appeal. This appeal seeks to demonstrate unconditional love to some of the world's poorest people suffering from the transmission, disability and discrimination that comes from contracting leprosy; seeking this year to eliminate leprosy in Mozambique; encouraging us all to play our part. There is an added incentive this year, that whatever we can donate between now and 24 April will be doubled by the UK government. If you want to see the video again, or are unable to join us on Zoom, you will find a link on our website, <https://rydebaptist.xyz> and full details of how you can donate can be found at www.leprosymission.org.uk. Let's see what we can all do to help.

One of our Bible readings today comes from Ezekiel 47:1-12. Here we have a great vision of a river of living water flowing from the Temple, with fruit trees growing on each bank. It concludes with the words, 'Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.' Seeing this vision and hearing these words our minds jump, as they are supposed to, to the passage in Revelation 22 where there is a vision of the New Jerusalem (there is no physical temple because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple) with its river flowing from the throne, and the tree of life with its twelve crops of fruit, and its conclusion 'And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.' [Revelation 2:2] This is a really powerful healing vision that links the Garden of Eden, the place where God first walked with the people he had created, with the Temple in Jerusalem and the revealing of the New Jerusalem.

Healing is at the heart of the ministry of Jesus and the good news that we are called to live and proclaim. Whether it is the healing of relationships between people, reflecting the healing of the relationship between God and his creation restored through the saving and redeeming work of Jesus His Son; or physical healing bringing wholeness and renewal to broken and diseased bodies and minds; or healing the broken cavernous space caused as a result of sin and death now defeated by the death and resurrection of our Lord: it is all about healing. If we are inspired by the stories from The Leprosy Mission today, let us play our part as servants of the Lord for the healing of the nations.

Zoom in the safest way for most people to meet at this time and will continue to be the main way that we will be able to meet for a little while yet, particularly now that we are in Tier 4. Our Zoom Sunday Service is at 10.30am today, and our Zoom Prayer Meeting is at 7pm on Monday. The Zoom links will be sent to those who have signed up to receive them. If you'd like us to send you the links, please let us know. If you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can click on the the readings and songs. There is more information on our website at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

The Prayer Course. Details of this and how to sign up have been sent to all those on our distribution list. Hosted on Zoom, this eight week course begins this Thursday 11 February at either 11am or 7pm for an hour. For further details see today's website page and sign up by the end of today.

BIBLE READINGS

[Ezekiel 47:1-12](#)

[Mark 1:29-45](#)

[1 John 4:16b-19](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

'God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: in this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.' [1 John 4:16b-19]

SONGS

[Here Is Love Vast As The Ocean](#)

[Great Is The Lord](#)

[Faithful One](#)

[Mighty To Save](#)

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

[from The Leprosy Mission 2021 resource]

Ezekiel 47:1-12 is the focus of the sermon. Just as in Ezekiel's vision water flows out from the temple, symbolising God's presence bringing life and healing wherever it goes, it is our prayer that God's blessing and healing for people affected by leprosy in Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique will flow out of the community hubs that we will build through your support.

In 597 BCE King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the superpower at the time, laid siege to Jerusalem and took 10,000 people into exile. One of those exiles was a man in his mid twenties called Ezekiel, who was called by God to be a prophet to the exiles in Babylon five years later. 14 years after the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel received a remarkable vision of the temple in Jerusalem being restored. Chapter 43 comes as a breath of fresh air, because "the glory of the LORD entered the temple" (43:3). It's a wonderful symbol that the LORD would return to be among the people he loved again.

No Matter How Far. Ezekiel has had an incredible guided tour of the temple in Jerusalem and now he sees water flowing out of the temple. A man carrying measuring equipment, who is guiding Ezekiel through the vision, leads him through water that is ankle deep, then knee deep, then waist deep, measuring around a quarter of a mile each time. But as Ezekiel is led further, the water becomes a river deep enough to swim in, in fact no one can cross it. Ezekiel is led to the riverbank where he is told that the river empties

into the Dead Sea and the salty lifeless water there becomes fresh.

Just as Ezekiel saw a river he couldn't cross; I wonder whether there are barriers in your life at the moment that seem too big to cross. Perhaps the idea of no more leprosy in Mozambique seems a huge goal. But that goal is what motivates Gabriel, a Community Health Worker, specially trained by The Leprosy Mission to travel to find and cure people with leprosy, no matter how far. He has a heart of compassion that shines through everything he does. Every day, he travels miles on his motorbike on red dirt tracks in baking heat to reach people in the most remote parts of Cabo Delgado, the most northerly region in Mozambique that is slightly larger than Scotland!

No Matter How Long. Look at how the fruit trees are described in verse 12: "Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing". The trees will not just be good for food; they will also bring healing. To a people scarred by exile, this offers great hope. God's people didn't know how long exile would last. But through Ezekiel's vision, they can look ahead to the restoration that God has promised. You might have noticed when the passage was read how often the word 'will' appears in verses 8 to 12. It's a powerful reminder that God will certainly do what he has promised, he will save his people. No matter how long it takes, rescue is coming.

One woman who has experienced God's unconditional love is Zaina, now a strong, confident woman from the village of Namatua in Cabo Delgado. Zaina was a young

girl when she first noticed discoloured patches on her skin. She didn't know what they were, but when they became visible to other people in her home village of Namatua, they recognised the signs of leprosy. Because of age-old myths surrounding disease, some of the villagers banished her to the bush, chanting at her over and over. Together with her young son, Zaina became homeless. When villagers came to take her three-year-old boy back to the village, she was heartbroken. Without food or medicine Zaina's body became increasingly weak. She hit rock bottom. By the grace of God a stranger found Zaina in the bush. He built her a hut to shelter from the rain and took her to a health post where her leprosy was cured. Leprosy Changemakers, trained by The Leprosy Mission, were able to go to Namatua and teach the villagers about leprosy and how it is easily cured. Zaina was able to take back her future into her own hands and is now a thriving member of her community. Determined others shouldn't have to suffer a similar fate, Zaina has trained as a Leprosy Changemaker herself. She is able to recognise the early signs of leprosy and has made it her mission to encourage others to do the same.

Maybe last year felt long to you because of the pandemic. Perhaps you feel that you've been waiting on the LORD for a long time to bring healing to your life in some way, whether that's physically or emotionally. Let this passage encourage you, that however long your 'exile' seems to last, the LORD has promised that as a follower of Jesus you will enjoy his presence forever.

No Matter What. The book of Ezekiel finishes on a triumphant note as it speaks of exiles returning to Jerusalem. The last

verse of the book says, “And the name of the city from that time on will be Jehovah Shammah, the LORD is there” (48:35). A remnant of the people of Judah did return to their land. The temple of Jerusalem was rebuilt, but the Bible doesn’t speak about God’s glory filling this second temple. But hundreds of years later, God’s own Son, present with the Father through eternity, came to earth as Emmanuel, God with us. The Word made flesh showed the Father’s glory (John 1:14). Jesus referred to himself as the temple, saying “destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Jesus was showing that it is through him that we can enter God’s presence.

In John’s first letter, we read “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his One and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10). If you think you have done something that means God couldn’t love you, please know that he loves you so much that he sent his only Son to die for you. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has paid the penalty for everything that we have ever done and ever will do, and has brought us atonement, at-one-ment with God. This is the way that God brings life to his people. Through Jesus, who loved us unconditionally, we will be at-one with God forever in God’s new creation, where there is no longer a need for a temple made of bricks and mortar because the LORD is there.

The powerful image of God’s glory flowing out of the temple, turning salt water fresh and bringing life wherever it goes, reminds us that God will stop at nothing to bring life and healing to his people because he loves us. Revelation 22:2 echoes

Ezekiel’s vision: “On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations”. At The Leprosy Mission we long for healing for more people like Zaina. Just as in Ezekiel’s vision God’s life-giving water flowed out of the temple, will you partner with us to build a hub from which God’s healing and love can flow to people affected by leprosy? These hubs are the beating heart of a village like Nam-atua. A safe space where every villager is welcomed unconditionally. A place where those who can’t read or write can learn about leprosy through drama, song and dance.

PRAYERS

Thank God that we can look forward to an eternal future in his presence because of his unconditional love for us.

Thank God for remarkable people like Zaina and Gabriel who show the love of Jesus so wonderfully in reaching out to people affected by leprosy.

Pray that many hubs would be able to be built to bring lasting change to people affected by leprosy in Mozambique.

Pray for safety and stamina for Leprosy Changemakers and health workers in these challenging and complex times.

SONG

[It Is Well With My Soul](#)

BLESSING

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always. Amen.

<https://rydebaptist.xy>