Message 27th September.

Good morning everyone, It is good to see everyone here today and our prayer is that the Lord will bless our time together as we read His word and examine it together to help us and encourage us as we seek to live for Him as individuals and collectively as church.

Over the last few weeks Pascal has been asking questions and last week the theme of his message was simply here just to survive or to live ? I will ask again are we here as individuals just to survive as christians or to live as christians ?

I would like to ask that question today from a church perspective and look at a new testament church,the church at Philipi and draw some practical lessons from it to challenge and encourage us as church. The church here today is made up of individuals as we see from Peter’s epistle in 1 Peter 2 verse 5. Not inert objects but described as living stones ! Here with a purpose.

What does it mean for us this morning ( to live) ? For the younger generation is it partying ? A night out ? Sports ? And for us who are older what does it mean ? A good meal ? An exotic holiday ?.

Look what it meant for the writer of the letter to the church that we are looking at today

Chapter 1 v 21 For me to live is Christ ! Does that describe us as individuals and as church . What a statement. For me to live is Christ. Are our lives centred on Christ. Easy to sing but is it a reality in us today ? Does this describe your life ? My life ?To live is Christ. Christ the centre as individuals and as church.

Paul wrote this letter while in prison, probably chained to a guard,sitting on the floor. No comfort for Paul but what does he say ? For me to live is Christ

Let us get out of survival mode and press the live button in our lives individually and collectively. To live is Christ. Let this be the new title over our lives.

Philipi for me has many similarities to Bergerac. Geographically it was on the main trading route from Europe to Asia. Where is Bergerac ? On the main road connecting the north east with the south west. The N21 that runs from Limoges to the Spanish border.

The church at Philipi was not a new church . It was created during Paul’s missionary journey in Acts16. We see from verse 1 of chapter 1 that it was an established church with structure as Paul writes to the elders,deacons and all the saints to thank them for a gift that they had sent to him.

It was a diverse church, people from different walks of life coming together as living stones to build something for God in Philipi. We have the jailer and his family, we have Lydia the buisness lady and others mentioned by name in Pauls letter who had came to faith in Christ,

It was a happy church as we see in chapter 1 verse 25, they were living in joy.

A church with vision. Chapter 3 v 13 . Forgetting those former things which are behind and moving forward

It was an active church chapter 1 v27 working together for the advance of the gospel.

There are many more important principles within the letter that we will perhaps look at some other time , but this morning I want to focus on these things.

Firstly a church with structure as we see in verse 1 of chapter 1 Paul writes to the elders,deacons and all the saints.

This shows the pattern for a new testament church and like every organisation a church needs structure. The Lord has blessed each one of us with spiritual gifts and capabilities and we must seek to use them for His glory.

In France we have the conseil as laid out by the government and as a church choses its conseil, it should prayerfully consider the giftings evident and available within the church and the conseil should reflect the new testament pattern . The conseil is not a position of power, its a position of service, to serve,to encourage the church ,not just so that the church can survive but provide guidance and encouragement so that the church can live and be a bright and shining light for Him.

A diverse church

The church at Philipi was a church where people who had come to know the Lord Jesus came together in the city of Philipi. As already mentioned we have,a jailer and his family,we have,Lydia the buisnesswoman, we have Epaphroditus, Euodia,Synteche,Clement all mentioned in the letter who formed part of the church at Philipi. As I look around here in the church at Bergerac as to how diverse we are, from various countries,various walks of life,what a diversity we are blessed with how the Lord has brought us all together. Each one of us has a God given talent that we can use if willing in His service.What a potential powerhouse we have here properly used in His service Its not by chance or by luck that we are together today it is the Holy Spirit working in our lives to bring us together. The Lord never intended us to be alone as individual christians and wherever we go in the world there are churches of born again believers like here in Bergerac meeting together to worship God and to serve Him.

A Happy Church

One of the great themes of this epistle is Joy

As we saw in chapter 1 v 25 it was a church that was filled with joy !

Are we filled with joy this morning ? Are we ? Chapter 4 v 4 Rejoce in the Lord always.

I think a great illustration of this is the canaries in the coal mine ! In 1906 1100 miners were killed in Courrieres in France in one massive chain of explsions caused by a build up of gas. But in the early days of coal mining they found an effective simple solution. They brought canaries into the mines ! A canarys metabolism is very sensitive to air quality. As long as as the bright yellow birds chirp and sing,miners know that the air is safe. If gas levels rise ,the canaries stop singing,wobble on their perch and eventually fall on the floor of their cage !

Christian joy is like that singing yellow bird. One of the first effect of sin or doctrinal error is that we lose our joy in christ. When your heart stops singing,that is a warning to watch your life and doctrine closely.

It was a church with vision

Chapter 3 v 13 forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which are before. What a vision Paul had to take the gospel to Europe. I love travelling and am fascinated by Pauls missionary journies. No aeroplanes, no TGVs no cars and yet God gave him this vision for the gentile nations to take the gospel to them. What is our vision as a church today ? Dare I ask do we have a common vision for the church in Bergerac ? To often we are in survival mode. People say in churches, « its worked for the last 20 years no need to change » or we have always done it like this and we are not changing » In Proverbs 29 v 18 we read « Where there is no vision the people perish » Some of you might be thinking well its not easy today, times have changed, or like what we were saying from Haggai a few weeks ago that it is not the right time to build the temple !

Some of you may know Chris Short an English missionary who commenced the work at Pontault Combault. I had the priviledge to spend time with him in the late seventies in Paris. He had a vision then to grow the church and the Lord has helped him tremendously. He has written a book. Decider de grandir which is worth reading. Shows the church doubling in size every year

Could I share my vision with you. My vision for the church in Bergerac is that two years from now God willing we have outgrown this building, are looking for larger premises and their is a real turning to God within this town

And lastly the church at Philipi was an active together missional church. Chapter 1 v27

They were all working together to spread the gospel. First of all they were active. If we are going to achieve we have to be active. I have said before satan loves inactivity. He loves churches who are in survival mode as they pose no threat to his kingdom. We have to be active, strategically have an aim and objective then a route map of how we are going to reach it then get on the road and achieve. In my work I travel all over France, I plan a route, there may be several choices but in the end I have to decide on one route then go ! I cannot spend hours sitting thinking about how, the problems I might encounter, the bad weather, the trafic jams I, have just got to deal with each challenge as I encounter it . For me the same rule applies in church , we will have difficulties. Look at Paul, shipwrecked,beaten,imprisoned but that did not deter him from achieving his aim.

In chapter 1verse 27 they were together. Together, my how difficult is that to achieve today. Togetherness I think is the biggest challenge that churches face today. In the church at Philipi there was obviously some difficulties as Paul alludes to in chapter 4 v2 where he pleads with Eudoi and Syntyche to be of the same mind. I said earlier that one of our strengths is that we were a diverse church but that can bring its challenges.

My way of doing things is right. Yours is wrong. How often do we hear that. Sometimes over silly things

In chapter 2 v 1 -4 we have Pauls desire for the church where he says make my joy complete by being likeminded, putting other before self serving each other with humility.

So let us unite in love and humility to build the church of God here in Bergerac for His glory