

Six Essentials for a church in 'lock down' (& beyond!)

***"Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come
—and the books, especially the parchments".***

2 Timothy 4 v 13

Please read 2 Timothy and especially note v13 in the context of chapter 4 v 6 – 18.

When we read Paul's second letter to Timothy, we read the last remaining letter of the Apostle. He is in 'lock down'; literally! He is writing to his dear young friend Timothy who is the Pastor of the church in Ephesus. Paul is in prison in Rome and believes that soon he will face the Roman court once again – and this time the end of his life will come.

His writing is full of pathos and feeling, yet realism and instruction. Luke seems to be in Rome and able to visit Paul but his request is for Timothy to come, if he possibly can. His request for Timothy to bring with him the three "essentials" mentioned in v13 is very instructive.

Using this verse, its context and the wider reminder of other Scriptures, we can apply this request pertinently to ourselves at Castlefields in our 'lock down' in these days. Whilst there are many other things that we would love to have, here are **six 'essentials'** for us to ensure that we have in place as our 'lock down' eases.

1. A right perspective of the 'big picture'.

Paul had been in prison in Rome before – but not quite like this! Note Acts 28 v 30/31. This time it was serious (v6). All around him things were changing & normality was crumbling (v10-16). That is just what has been happening in our days of lock down. But Paul had an awareness of the "big picture" (v17/18). It needs to be the same for us. It is essential that our eyes look in faith beyond the present trials to the big picture of God's sovereignty & His purposes for the church. "*Mission Unstoppable*", begun in Acts, still goes on and will be completed, we should not lose sight of that truth.

The Prophet Habakkuk lived in desperate days but in Hab 2 v 1 we read that he went up into a 'watch tower' to wait & see what God would do. There he received the encouraging word of Hab 2v14: "*For the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*".

Personally, we must not forget that the Lord is progressively sanctifying us so that we might be "blameless" at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 5 v 23/24). It may be, that through our 'lock down' that is being achieved in specific ways - so we must recognize that and thank God for it.

2. A right love for the local church.

God has brought us all here to Castlefields for His purposes and we are to love the church into which He has placed us. It is very easy to become dissatisfied and envious of larger, more 'tech savvy' & prosperous churches. We can easily 'church hop' on line but this can result in us becoming critical and 'picky' with the leadership and with the way things are done here. Excessive comparisons can leave us feeling that Castlefields is a very ordinary sweet in a bag of other church goodies that are on offer.

We all need to place ourselves into the spirit and practical outworking of Romans 12. Timothy was reminded by Paul that in Ephesus, the local church into which he had been called, he was to "hold fast" (1v13), "be strong" (2v1) and there to faithfully "preach the Word" (4v2). All that was to be "in season and out of season". In other words, at all times, whatever the circumstances; even in 'lock down'.

3. A right involvement in service for the Lord.

Paul was a man who had travelled many miles, preached to thousands, pastored, mentored & taught to great effect. He was a man of massive ability and usefulness; and yet, now he is

'locked down'. Was this a time to give up and give in? No! Paul calls for "books" – so that he can read and learn yet more of God, and "parchments" – paper to write on. Maybe further Epistles were in his mind, to Timothy and other churches. He saw that 'lock down' was still a time to serve! How Timothy must have benefitted from this wonderfully encouraging & practical letter. How we still benefit from it today, as inspired Scripture. We are glad that Paul did not give up on serving the Lord in 'lock down'.

Our preaching series in Acts chapter chap 8, impressed upon us how we might come alongside someone – although not in a chariot these days! – and share the gospel with them. We could ask them, about the Bible they are reading, "Do you understand..." just as Philip did to the Ethiopian Eunuch. We could guide them into reading Christian literature and biography.

By writing as he does in v13 Paul is saying what we must say, "I'm not done serving yet – despite being locked down!"

4. A right awareness of the dangers that surround us.

For the Christian there are always dangers to beware of. Every period and phase of life presents its own temptations, pitfalls and trials of faith. A period of 'lock down' is no different! In chap 2v3 Paul reminds Timothy that he is a "good soldier of Jesus Christ". Soldiers are for fighting, for warfare and for winning battles. As Christians we should never forget these truths.

The temptations of 'lock down' are many, here are just a few:

Selfishness; Idleness; Over-work; Introspection; Doubt; Anxiety; Boredom; Time wasting; Moodiness; Hard heartedness (towards your spouse, your children, your parents, the Government, church leaders); Internet sinfulness; TV bingeing; Xbox gaming (too much!)

We need to pay special attention to the Lord's Day and ensure that we do not lose the blessings of Isaiah 58 v13/14. Self-discipline in "attending" the services at the set times (as we always would have done) will help us to keep a good structure and discipline to the day for our spiritual good. This will particularly help with the raising of children and profitable family life.

A 'lock down' is wearing, and that is a strategy that Satan loves – to wear us down so that we lose our spiritual sharpness! We need to watch out, because he wants to "devour" us (1Peter 5v8). Take action now – before it is too late! 'Lock down' can, and should be for profit – pray that it certainly would not be for loss!

5. A right balance of praise & worship.

Maybe our attitude is, "we'll sing when 'lock down' ends". We might feel like the Old Testament people of God in Psalm 137 v 4, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?". We see 'lock down' as a foreign land and we just want to be free of it! Until then, how can we really praise God?

Paul longed to be joyful – we can see that in chap 1v4. If Timothy could come to visit him, he would be filled with joy. Sometimes we take that to an extreme and say "if only... then I will sing" but that is not right. God has not changed; Jesus has not changed and everything that is true about our salvation has not changed – every Christian needs to sing - now!

Everything about the coronavirus is horrible, fearful and terrible. What a contrast in Psalm 147 v 1, it tells us that singing praises to our God is "pleasant" and praise is "beautiful". In the previous Psalm it tells us that we should sing praise while we have life and being! Even in 'lock down' we have those things and we need to balance the difficulties, fears and worries with praise!

We must not forget how to sing! 'Lock down' may end, but the opportunity for Christians to sing praises in a corporate, church setting may not be allowed for many, many months to come. Seek out good resources – the Internet is full of them – to enable you to praise and worship the Lord in prayer and in song – it will do your soul good!

6. A right dependence on the Lord.

How very alone Paul must have felt in his 'lock down'. How sad to read that "all forsook him" in his hour of need. So, in v 17/18, how much he was helped by the Lord standing with him, strengthening him and in knowing that in the end He would deliver him and preserve him right

through to his final place in God's heavenly kingdom. There was no one else he could depend on now; he was cast upon God.

For us, as individuals, the future is totally unknown. There may well be many job losses in Derby and the practical, emotional and spiritual fall out from this 'lock down' may be massive.

As a church we are faced with the tremendous logistical problems of a small building and a large congregation! What are we to do? How are we to "do church" in all its aspects (Sunday Services, The Lord's Table, Baptism, Youth work etc)?

Our dependence on the Lord for help in all these things is essential. Humanly speaking we have no quick and easy answers. Our dependence is to be individually but it is to be corporately too.

There are many things that we will want to do and experience after 'lock down' has ended but here are six essentials that we must have right now. If they are right today, then with God's help, they will be right during the easing of current restrictions and right when we come right through.

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