

Bethel Christian Church

Preaching Series in 2009

In God Alone

The title 'In God Alone', I have taken from the great hymn "In Christ Alone. However, the title alone may not give an immediate lead to my thoughts and plans for the series.

In the first place let me give my rationale for preaching through a series. It is important that we proclaim the 'full counsel of God. When we move according to a popular topical model we may well avoid this. In fact from experience over many years I have found we will certainly avoid this. By seeking to preach through a book of the Bible or a theme from the Scriptures under the leading of the Holy Spirit then we will needs grapple with the wider thrust of God's Gospel. I have found also that when we come to a series from the Scriptures then we will inevitably be addressing real life issues for all ages and maturity levels of believers. Any notion that we can avoid the conflict of grace and law, the cross and moralism by speaking a populist message will show short term gains but long term disaster.

'In God Alone' is a series I intend to work out by considering the life and testimony of several Biblical characters. Actually we will be considering God's testimony to us through them. Despite their sins and weaknesses the great men and women of the Scriptures come by the mercy of God and the providence of His plans to acknowledge that they were what they were by His hand. Their identity and significance in God's salvation history came from their relationship with Him. Very few were what we popularly imagine 'saints' to be. In their number we find terribly weak people, killers, adulterers, schemers and hard headed rebels. This in no way excuses any of their behaviour but simply points to the reality that we are called to bear witness to God's grace not our own so called spirituality or holiness. We should find no comfort in these great people being weak, any more that we find our own sins and weaknesses a comfort. What we find through God's Covenant care is that our very weaknesses cause and convince us to look solely to God for mercy and ministry. He is our comfort. In God alone we can stand, walk and leap for the joy of it.

Too often we have looked at these famous Biblical characters as great moral beacons. This approach has evolved from a moralistic approach to God's truth. If only we can try a bit harder we can do what is right and please God. The men and women in both Testaments rarely provide such moral high ground to which we should aspire. When they do they would despair if we turned them into models to strive after. The key to understanding God's revelation is relationships: "Not where we breathe but where we love we live". We may proudly be able to tick off certain 'holy traits' certain moral standards by which we live, yet know nothing of God. Jesus came to a whole generation of Israel, some of whom like Paul could claim to be faultless before the law, but who hated God so much they sought to tear Him from their hearts and His throne from heaven. Every culture, be it Australian or Chinese has a variation of this moralism running deeply through it. This must be as the nations attempt to remove God from his throne and his ministry to them (Psalm 2). Theologically we see that this moralism provided some kind of distance between us and God. We deal with laws and principles instead of a personally present Holy God who has declared that not one of us can move an inch towards Him.

The legacy God gives us from these great Biblical people is primarily this: He promised to come to them; He did come, and He did bring them into His great Covenant love.

The people we will consider:

Eve: Mother of lies, Mother of the Messiah

Able: His Blood still Speaks

Noah: Preacher of Righteousness, Father of sorrow

Abraham: Our Father in the faith

Jacob: Stealer of Blessings, receiver of Grace

Moses: Meek, Weak and Mighty

Gideon: Israel's Saviour, Israel's Curse

Ruth: Drawn out from the Depths

David: A man after God's own heart

Jonah: God Will Save His Nations

John the Baptist: The Prophet Who Saw the Messiah

Peter: Flawed Flighty and Forgiven

Timothy: How God Toughens the Timid

We will do well not to draw these people out of the context in which God was establishing His Covenant relationship with Israel and then the Church and through her the world.

If we turn each of these into 'one persons search for faith and God' we will never hear the cry of God in their lives. Through these people, according to the New Testament, God is declaring himself and his ways to us. Because in Jesus all the promises given to these ancient people come to their fulfilment they all in there own way lead us to fix our eyes upon Jesus.

*In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song;*