



STAYING CONNECTED WEEK 29, SUNDAY 4TH OCTOBER LIVING PROTECTED LIVES

Helen and I were out in the countryside recently, and as we returned to the car what began as a thoroughly relaxing, peaceful walk, enjoying time together in God's beautiful Creation, ended in panic & a degree of pain! We both got attacked by a swarm of bees!

As I walked along quietly a bee bumped into my forehead, followed instantaneously by 15-20 bees buzzing me. It was terrifying! As I punched myself repeatedly on the head, I killed a bee inside my right ear, 2 or 3 behind that ear, some on my forehead & a few more in my hair. I tore off my T-shirt to try to escape others who had stung my chest & back. Helen looked around, alarmed to hear me shouting & seemingly beating myself up, and tried to come to my aid. But as she moved towards me, to her horror, a whole swarm descended on her head, stinging Helen repeatedly too. Instinctively she started to flail her arms around her head but this seemed to make things worse & as she ran the bees followed her. With all the commotion a very kind lady rushed to our aid from an office in Proctor's Cheese factory. This lady & I eventually managed to pull out & kill the 20-30 bees that had landed in & got entwined in Helen's hair. Back at the car, 20 minutes later & somewhat traumatized, I poured a jar of water over Helen's hair & a couple more bees came out. I have no idea how many stings we had between us, nor what had prompted this attack, but it was frightening. Later when reading about bee stings I was interested to come across an article written by an Entomologist who said, "If a bee 'bumps into' you, it's not an accident. RUN! If a colony of bees thinks you are a predator it first sends out a few guard bees to warn you away by 'head butting' you. If you feel a 'head butt' RUN as the next thing that comes is a full-scale attack by the entire hive! It feels good to swat at the bees but it can make things worse as the bees feel threatened & their natural response is to rise up together & defend their queen". I will know for next time!

My story of the bees made me think of the "attack" from many sources that Christians can feel & how often it comes completely out of the blue. For some it is health, others their livelihood, maybe poverty looms, or any of the many other things that currently result in removing our security & surrounding us with uncertainty. Even the freedoms that we have had in the past to be with each other in families, or in the church family, have all gone. And so, we feel vulnerable and exposed to the spiritual attack of the enemy. What can we do?

I heard someone recently put a fresh perspective on Ephesians 6:10-18, where Paul paints a picture of what a 'protected' Christian life looks like using imagery taken from the occupying Romans soldiers. In vv.10-13 we are told to, "Be strong in the LORD & in His mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh & blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world & against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms". When we do this it doesn't mean we won't get sick, nor avoid bee stings or the challenges surrounding us today, but it tells us that we can live through these 'protected' in the spiritual sense.

I live protected when I put on the '**helmet of salvation**' and I understand and remember that I am a child of God who has received a kingdom that cannot be shaken. If everything is lost, I still have Jesus, and that is enough.

I live protected when my '**breastplate of righteousness**' is in place. I am clothed in Christ & I stand before Him, redeemed, forgiven, accepted & loved. My standing with God does not depend on my own good works & effort, but because of my accepting Jesus as my Saviour & that is enough.

I live protected when my feet have been fitted with '**the gospel of peace**', and I realize that I have a purpose on this earth. I am made in God's image & am called to be an 'image bearer' with self-worth & a good news story to tell to those hurting around us. My life has eternal purpose!

I live protected with the '**belt of truth**' around me & the '**shield of faith**' in front of me. I hold on to my belief in God & who He says He is & that He will do what He says He will do. I remember that God IS TRUTH, that the devil is a liar, and that God's Word endures forever.

I live protected carrying '**the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God**', living, active & sharper than any two-edged sword. It cuts through all the lies I encounter from the enemy of my soul.

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MARK CRAIG SAYS

In a recent article “*The Church of the Future*” in Mission Catalyst which can be accessed free of charge at www.bmsworldmission.org/catalyst, Mark Craig says, “*Things are going to have to change. COVID-19 has forced us to look over the parapet, to do church differently.... Technology has proved popular with all the age groups. My 85-year-old aunt has got herself an iPad and mastered Zoom (which she’s sure is some kind of magic) to the point where she’s happily taking a regular part in her church’s life.*”

The interesting bit is that her health hasn’t allowed her to get to church in person for some years. But now, she’s fully part of the church, and she’s loving it. She’s not looking forward to the end of lockdown, because she fears that the church will just revert back to what it did before and she’ll be left once again with no way to engage.

And that’s the key opportunity, as we look to a post-virus future. We can learn from what we’ve needed to do in lockdown and enable a very different kind of engagement. What’s not on the table (at least for churches that want to thrive) is ‘going back to normal’. We can’t pretend the last months didn’t happen, and simply start doing what we were – largely unsuccessfully – doing before.”

He concludes that, “*Online isn’t everything. It can’t replicate how we interact with each other physically... but it offers new engagements, for new audiences, for new thinking, for new leadership, for new governance, for a new way of being church.”*

GOD SAYS

Isaiah 43:18-19 “*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland”.*

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Paul then immediately follows this by encouraging us to ‘*pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers & requests... be alert & always keep on praying for all the LORD’s people*’. Be persistent in your prayers for all believers.

Good questions to ask ourselves then are:

Am I standing firm?

Am I missing any pieces of the armour?

Are their dents in my shield of faith?

Have I had disappointments & setbacks?

Do I still believe God is good?

Do I hold on to the sword of the spirit in my hand?

Am I winning the battle in my mind & heart, & holding on to the truth?

None of us know what lies ahead, but we can be equipped and empowered to be able to stand our ground & live protected lives.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Following the great success of & positive feedback after our zoom prayer meeting in September where our various missionaries zoomed in, we have decided to have ‘mission guests’ each month at our First Wed Mission Zoom Prayer Meeting.

This Wednesday 7th October at our Mission Zoom Prayer Meeting, our 3 friends from Myanmar will attend. This time they will have more space to tell us about their work in the college, on the mission field and with the orphanages that they run.

Principal Mang & Pastors Siang & Eng are very happy to answer any questions people may have, but it would be a bit easier for them if they knew in advance at least some of the questions. They will also be leading us in prayer.

