

THE HOUSE OF GOD ADVENT COURSE

SESSION ONE " THE HOUSE THAT BEARS MY NAME"

SONG: CMP 248 How lovely is thy dwelling place

Welcome to this Advent Course, I hope you all will find it stimulating as together we go on a journey to Bethlehem.

The Course title the House of God ,concentrating on the word HOUSE which in both Greek and Hebrew means more than a dwelling place, it means a household or family. And of course, it is not our house or our ministers, or in my case a Local Pastor , or indeed the Methodist Church's House but God's house or household or family. Note, not the physical building.

QUESTION 1

As a member of your Church/House of God do you feel part of the household or family of God.? Please be honest and please remember that any conversation is for the privacy of the group not for gossip.

Share why or why not, It may well raise pastoral questions.

A journey: The Magi are on their way; it will take them up to two years to reach Bethlehem. The shepherds will be sorting out their night rotas who will be on duty on the wonderous night?

The Inn Keeper is already counting the money from his full inn. "MONEY< MONEY< MONEY" the Abba song.

The Holy family will be getting ready to journey as well, which way, through hostile Samaria or go round the long way to Bethlehem.

Where to stay, what to pack or will they even arrive with a heavily pregnant young woman?

Reading: *JEREMIAH 7 v1-11*

False Religion Worthless

7 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 "Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message:

"Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. 3 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. 4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!" 5 If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, 6 if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. 8 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

9 "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things? 11 Has this

house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.

Jeremiah is told to stand at the gate of the Temple, the Lord's House and tell out the Word of the Lord to the people as they enter for worship.

What God has to say to His people is not good news *v3-7*.

I remember going with a fellowship group I belonged to, to view the film "The Last Temptation of Christ" at a Southampton cinema. When we arrived there, we found a large group of Christians outside the Cinema protesting about the film stating it was blasphemous. After much discussion we decided to go in. There was a lot in the film and the way it was presented I did not agree with, however it did leave me with a lasting impression that Christ's temptations were not limited to just the wilderness encounter with the devil.

QUESTION 2

In what disposition should we enter the House of God, the house that bears his name? See below.

We are on an Advent journey as well.

Jesus in *MATTHEW 5 v23-24* tells people that if they are offering a gift at the altar but remember that your brother has something against you. Leave the gift and go and sort it out. *23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*

Is it not the same with our gift of worship.

Do we have the right spiritual attitude? I suggest at this point you look at the Fruit of the Spirit *GALATIANS 5 v22-23*, then we will be allowed to live in this place. *v3* and *v7*. This place means the land of Israel that was given to their forefathers for ever and ever. The Israelites are asked to reform their ways and actions.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

QUESTION 3

From the reading what are the actions that need reforming and how are we and the world still guilty of these things?

Talk about examples.

The Israelites were absolutely convinced that no matter what they did [*v10*] they were safe from the judgement of God.

Can we as Christians say that we are safe from God's judgement because we are Christians and have the Cross.

Are we trusting in deceptive words? DISCUSS.

QUESTION 4

Have we a God given right for our Church to be in this place, the community that God has put us in, if we do not obey his great commandment ? [*MARK 12 v28-31*]

The Greatest Commandment

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

The fate of the Israelites was exile in a foreign land. **What is the fate of the Methodist Church if we do not listen to His Word?**

For the Word has become flesh and has dwelt amongst us.

"But I have been watching" declares the Lord" *v11*. The Hebrew means he has been observing and taking note.

QUESTION 5

The Magi were watching a star, the shepherds were watching sheep and Mary and Joseph were waiting.

This Christmas what are we watching and waiting for ? and do we expect to see a sign that God is calling us to account for our stewardship of the Church that bears His Name?

DISCUSS how we can prepare ourselves and our Churches to meet our watching God this Christmas, after all that we have been through this year.?

Prayer

Watching God, what have you been observing and taking note of?

Are you pleased with how we are preparing to meet you this Christmas?

We are starting to put the tree up, hang the decorations and find and purchase the presents, have we considered the alien in our midst, the fatherless or motherless children, the widow or widower, the homeless or the hungry?

Watching God, we are sorry if we have forgotten you and those in need in our community, for you still stand at the door of our hearts and Churches calling out for a real change in our ways and actions. Forgive us Lord if we have forgotten you and them.

SILENCE

Watching God, you say to all those who turn back to you with broken and contrite hearts. "I will let you live in this place; in the land I gave to your forefathers for ever and ever"

AMEN

SONG: CMP 389 Jesus, you are changing me
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Peter Castle September/October 2021