

## Pastoral Letter January 2014

### Happy New Year?

The phrase is very familiar to us. Many people greet each other during January with the words, 'happy new year'. What is it, however, that constitutes a truly 'happy' new year? Different people will answer in different ways. To the jobless, a happy new year will bring settled employment. To the many in the world who go hungry, it will be regular meals. To the person who craves to be married, it will be a wife or a husband with whom to share their lives. To the student wishing to go to university, it will be exam success. And so on. All such aspirations are fine, and none of them, as such, is unworthy of a Christian. But is that *all* that would make up a happy new year? Or is there more? Surely there *is* more – much more – for the disciple of Jesus. So what might that 'much more' comprise? Here is a 'magnificent seven' of key ingredients.

1 *A closer walk with God in each of his three persons.* Though there is only one God, he is known to us in his persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and not only known but enjoyed. We have fellowship with each person of the Godhead as well as with God as one God. This year, may we come to know him better, love him more, appreciate more fully all that we owe to him, and glorify him with our whole lives.

2 *Victory over sin and progress in holiness.* How urgently we require divine help in these two related areas. Nothing slows us up and drags us down like sin, for it grieves and dishonours God and impedes our spiritual growth. Similarly, nothing is more needful than being more holy as God is holy, becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ, and day by day being filled with the Holy Spirit.

3 *True heaven-sent Holy Spirit revival for the church.* We are not interested in things 'worked up' from below, but in blessings 'poured down' from above. Only a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit can revive the dry bones on every side and cause the church of Jesus to be truly a living church, proclaiming the living gospel, and being used in the complete transformation of everything around us.

4 *The turning of the nation to godliness.* This follows on from the previous note. The answer to our national dilemma is not (fundamentally) economic or social, neither is it a matter of people's background, upbringing and education – whatever roles these things might play. No! The root of the problem is a nation which has turned its back upon God, and only he can turn the tide and bring us to himself again.

5 *The conversion of many souls – and especially our own loved ones.* How we long earnestly for news of people being truly converted – deep conviction of sin, sincere repentance, and heartfelt looking to Jesus – and not least in our own dear families, to the glory of God. This would make 2014 a wonderfully happy new year!

6 *Power in the pulpit.* May weak and woolly preaching be gone for ever! Oh, that God would visit afresh the pulpits of the land (including our own) with unction from on high, that we would not hear the voice or see the face of man but of God. What a difference that would make.

7 *Jesus' second coming.* Do we pray for this – long for this – look for this – expect this? Jesus has said that he is coming. The Bridegroom is on his way. How does his bride respond?