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Briefing 72: Wednesday 14th July, 2021.

Dear Friends,

The weapons and armour of the Christian – the Sword of the Spirit – which is the Word of God.

Whilst it might be possible to do some damage by hitting people with a shield or tying them up with a belt, the only recognisable weapon in the Christian's armoury is the sword of the Spirit which, as Ephesians 6:17 explains **'is the Word of God.'** This isn't an excuse for Christians to literally bash people on the head with their Bibles! Not least because these parts of a Christian's armour are all given first and foremost with the aim of helping Christians stand firm in their faith as they struggle against the devil's schemes and against the rulers, authorities and the powers of this dark world. There is, however, a power in God's Word which means that it is also an offensive weapon. We'll briefly look at both here.

Firstly, God's word is a defensive weapon against attacks.

In the Lord of the Rings, Gollum leads Frodo into a set of caves and caverns where the giant spider Shelob has her lair. It's not long before Frodo is caught up in giant spider's webs, facing a very nasty end. Fortunately, he manages to pull out his sword, cut himself free, and make his escape.

As I've mentioned a number of times, when the accuser ties us up in his web of deceit by reminding us of our sins and failings, or when we are plagued by doubts or fear or temptation, our only hope is to take hold of God's Word- here called the Sword of the Spirit. For in the Bible, we are reminded of the truth of God's grace and mercy, of his unending love, of the truth about our salvation and of the right way to live in God's world. These truths cut through Satan's lies and set us free again. If we have the Word of Truth to hand, then just like Frodo, we will not be caught up in lies or deceit and led astray. Even Jesus had to face these kinds of difficulties – think back to his temptation by the devil. The devil quoted the Bible to Jesus, hoping to trip him up, and only by knowing the Bible himself was Jesus able to defend himself from the devil's attack.

But the Word of God is also an offensive weapon, used by the Holy Spirit to pierce hard hearts and change broken lives.

If you are a Christian today, it is because someone told you the good news of Jesus and the Holy Spirit applied that Word to your heart so that you believed and were saved. This is how God's kingdom grows. Human empires grow by force or fear or coercion, but God's kingdom grows as the Word of God is declared and the Spirit of God brings that word to life in the mind and heart of the ones who hear it. In that way lives are changed, communities transformed, and inch by inch, person by person, God's kingdom advances.

So if we are to stand firm in our faith we need to know our Bibles well. For only then are we able to detect half-truths, misquotes and passages taken out of context when we hear them, and respond to attacks, fears and doubts with clarity and truth. And if we are to help advance God's kingdom, then again, we need to know our Bibles. For only in the Scriptures do we find the good news of God and the very words of eternal life which we can share with others, and by which a person can be born again.

This passage gives us an urgent call to know what's in our Bibles, and to know how to correctly handle the Word of God. Is that true of you? There is plenty of help available, if not...

Grace and peace...

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

Sunday 25th July: The End of Restrictions. As you'll have heard, the Prime Minister has now confirmed that all current Covid restrictions will be lifted on July 19th, meaning that we could, in theory, have a 'normal' church service on Sunday 25th. However, the Prime Minister also suggested that we act responsibly, something that the wardens of both churches and I are keen to do. We also have a Christian responsibility to love and care for one another.

We WILL be singing together; that's a non-negotiable. But we will also keep hand sanitiser by the door, keep the church clean and well-ventilated, and of course, individuals will be able to continue wearing face coverings if they so choose. However, we'd like your thoughts on what, if any, of the current precautions you would like to see us keeping, at least for the time being. We'd particularly like to hear from those who have a low level of auto-immunity and from others who feel concerned by the restrictions easing. How can we keep the church gathering a place where you feel safe and comfortable?

We have thought that we might keep some areas of the church for those who are nervous or who have a compromised immunity. Face masks would be required in these areas and the seats would be set further apart, as now. Perhaps you can let us know your thoughts on this and share any other suggestions.

It may be that the Church of England brings forward its own guidelines, and we will be keeping an eye out for those. But in the meantime, do let us know your thoughts, and keep me and our PCCs in your prayers.

Come + pray!

WEDNESDAY NIGHT from 7:45pm-9pm Zoom.

Where our Mission focus will be on Bridge Builders- Please Contact Dave for a link.

Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm-10pm.

Come + join us and pray for God's Holy Spirit to move in us and across this town that we might know more of God's love and power in our lives and see many brought to Jesus.

Private Prayer in St Nicholas church THIS WEEK and NEXT WEEK.

Tuesday from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday 12noon-2pm and Thursday 10am – 12 noon.



MORNING COFFEE IN THE VICARAGE GARDEN: The Vicarage Garden Café is taking bookings for **Wednesday 14th July (10:30am-noon)**. We can take up to 30 people sat at tables of 6 around the garden and there is still room for more people to come this. If you like to join us, please contact Judy asap on 01438 213587

CHURCH FAMILY BBQS – We have lots of space for Saturday 24th July from 4pm. Booking forms are in both churches but you can also book by email. We're asking every family group to bring either some soft drink, a salad of some description, or a pudding to serve 6-8. Come along and enjoy some fellowship together!

WALKING GROUP: After my appeal, David Cattell (husband of Karen) has kindly offered to lead a group. He's suggested a walk once or twice a month, either from the church or from places nearby. If you'd be interested in being part of this- do email me (Dave).

READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS: This week we continue our series in Genesis, and for those who'd like to read the passages before coming to church on Sundays, the readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

18th July: Genesis 6:1-7:24 25th July: Genesis 8:1-9:17 1st August: Genesis 9:18-29

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY: August Bank Holiday Monday afternoon– teas in the church yard at St Mary's Graveley. PLUS the Maze will be open and there will be various activities around the church and grounds.

FURTHER THEOLOGICAL STUDY? Jacky Swanson has been studying a theology course with the Kings School of Theology (KST) for the last couple of years, and finding the tutors and teaching excellent. KST have recently produced a promotional video giving details about themselves and the courses they provide. Please see the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2AI113I2fg> There is also a FREE online taster session on Saturday 17th July, from 10:00 to 11:30am. Bookings via kingstheology.org/taste. Give it a try! If you have any questions about the course, please do get in touch with Jacky.