

## Return to the Lord for He is gracious and merciful

The themes below were explored at our recent online gathering ([bit.ly/rttljoel](http://bit.ly/rttljoel)).

### Consider & confess

Through Haggai, the Lord calls His people to "consider their ways". Despite their best efforts, their 'agricultural economy' is failing, because they have neglected the 'house of the Lord' ([Haggai 1:1-11](#)). In Hosea, the "land mourns and all who dwell in it languish", because of sins and apostasy of the people, particularly the "priests" and "prophets" (who should know better) ([Hosea 4:1-11](#)). Then and now, the state of the land and its inhabitants is an indicator of the spiritual condition of (God's) people. Many current issues in rural life (and society in general) are symptoms of the underlying spiritual malaise in nation and church and its leadership. Diverse wings of the church are capitulating to the spirit of the age by uncritically adopting its consumerism, 'celebrity culture', and 'woke' agenda or even consorting with the 'gods of the nations' by mixing New-Age/pagan practices with Christian worship. *Pray that we will have the courage seriously to consider our ways and confess our sins, confident that He will abundantly pardon and turn us back to His way ([Isaiah 55:7](#)).*

### Return & rebuild

Scripture repeatedly warns against allowing beliefs and practices rooted in pagan gods and idols to become part of our thinking and worship. If we "mingle with the nations, adopt their customs and worship their idols" ([Psalm 105:35-36](#)), these will become a snare to us ([Exodus 23:32](#); [Deuteronomy 7:25-26](#); [2 Corinthians 11:1-4](#)). Sadly, biblical knowledge and discernment are often so low, so compromised, that many in the church, much less outside it, have little understanding of the demonic powers behind these things. We need to be aware, warn and guide believers and seekers to the true Jesus and salvation ([Matthew 7:13-14](#)), and to work to build up the body of Christ in discernment, knowledge and maturity ([Ephesians 4:1-23](#); [2 Timothy 2:15](#)). *Pray for: the Lord to show us if we have adopted wrong teaching, beliefs or spiritual practices ([Psalm 139:23-24](#)); repentance, returning to the 'straight and narrow path'; teaching and equipping to expose false gods, idols and practices, whether pagan, occult or New Age, and; hearts, homes, houses of prayer and churches that are pure and undefiled; for those who have become deceived or ensnared.*

### Watch & warn

Luke's account of the crucifixion displays many 'voices' jeering and questioning Jesus' validity as the Messiah ([Luke 23:35-39](#)), just as the serpent questioned God's 'Word' in Eden ([Genesis 3:1-5](#)), while his followers are watching silently from a distance (Luke 23: 49). Many voices today also question the validity of our faith, yet many Christians watch silently from a distance. Fear and lack of "knowing Him better" ([Ephesians 1:17](#)) are two key reasons why. However, Ezekiel 33 records a warning from God: if we do not warn of the dangers then the 'blood' of any who are lost is on our hands. Remaining silent is not an option! Like the apostles, *pray and ask for boldness to declare the truth in your contexts, and He will fill you with His Spirit ([Acts 4:23-31](#)).*

## Spring festivals

Passover, Unleavened Bread and First-Fruits (coinciding this year with Passion and Easter) speak of Jesus' atoning death, burial and resurrection. In preparation, the Lord commanded Israel to cleanse their homes of leaven ([Exodus 12:15](#)). Leaven represents sin, which spreads from little to corrupt much ([1 Corinthians 5:6](#); [Galatians 5:9](#)), and of which we should 'beware' ([Mark 8:15](#); [Matthew 16:6](#)) ([bit.ly/jpnleav](http://bit.ly/jpnleav)). As we remember Jesus' suffering and death for us, let us cleanse our hearts, our lives and our churches of 'leaven' and offer Him pure worship.

*Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth ([1 Corinthians 5:7-8](#)).*

## Future events

Please join one of our **online meetings** in May to share stories of mission and outreach in your community or setting, learn from, and pray for, one another, and help build a resource of ideas.

7.30 - 9 pm, Wednesday 17 May

9 - 10.30 am, Saturday 27 May

Link: [hhttps://web.zoom.us/join](https://web.zoom.us/join)

Meeting ID: 815 7509 2540

Passcode: 629376

**A 'Day on the Farm' - 'Stories of hope'**

**10 am - 6 pm, Saturday 1 July, 2023.**

**Southfields Farm, Coleshill, B46 3EJ.**

Building on the above, we invite you to a 'day on the farm' hosted by John & Betty Plumb. Come and share in fellowship, prayer, worship, workshops and a picnic, as we explore further our call to mission in rural Britain.