**Small Group notes – 16 Dec 2018**

**Welcome**

What are 3 physical things in this life which you hope will also be a part of life in the age to come?

**Worship**

Read Isaiah 65:17-25 together and use it as a basis for reflection, praise and thanksgiving.

**Word – Heaven, What, Where and When**

* God’s plan of redemption is the kingdom of Heaven coming to earth – not us going to Heaven.
* Much of the world sees Christian salvation in terms of leaving this world and going to Heaven when we die. Some scriptures seem to support this view: Jn 14:1-4; Phil 3:20; Mat 6:19-21; 1 Pet 1:3-5;
* Along with this understanding of salvation is the idea that the present earth will be completely destroyed (scrapped): 2Pet 3:7; 2Pet 3:10-13; and replaced with a brand one: 2Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1; Isa 65:17
* This can lead us to wonder what the age to come will be like, with people often imagining it in terms of a spiritual existence in Heaven rather than any kind of physical, bodily life such as we know on earth – this despite knowing that our bodies are going to be resurrected.
* However the Bible teaches that it is not only mankind that God is reconciling to himself but all of creation: Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:10; Acts 3:21
* Redemption doesn’t mean scrapping what’s there and starting again from a clean slate, but rather liberating what has come to be enslaved (*Tom Wright: Surprised by Hope*): Rom 8:19-21; Ps 98:7-9
* The passing away of the first heaven and the first earth and their replacement with a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1) parallels the description of our own salvation in 2Cor 5:17: “*If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has passed away; the new has come”*. What God is doing for us he will also do for the whole of creation!
* Although we go to Heaven when we die (Phil 1:21-25) this is not the hope in which we were saved. The big moment we and all creation are waiting for is not that, but the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:23-24). This is the salvation ready to be revealed at the last time ( (1 Pet 1:5). See John 6:39,40,44,54. This is the moment when death is swallowed up by life!
* The New Jerusalem is what Christ went into Heaven to prepare for us but at the fulness of time it comes down out of Heaven onto the new earth Rev 21:2, 10, 24. The throne of God is in the city (Rev 22:3). At this point it would seem “Heaven and Earth are overlapping. God’s space and human spaces totally united and connected” (*Tim Mackie – Exploring My Strange Bible Podcast*).
* God’s plan is for us to live on a re-born earth together with him and Jesus ( *the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth* – Rom 8:22)

**Questions**

* Read 1Peter 1:3-9. Peter is writing to a suffering, scattered and persecuted church. Do you think all people need hope? What kind of things do those without faith sometimes put their hope in? What forms the bedrock or basis of the hope of which Peter reminds them? Why do you think it is foundational? In what sense is this hope a “living” hope? How does it differ from the kind of things that the world puts their hope in? What do you think Peter is referring to by “the coming of the salvation ready to be revealed at the last time”? How can we reconcile this with verse 9 which says that they are already receiving their salvation?
* Read Col 1:15-20. What do you think Paul means by “all things”. Why would “all things” need reconciling to God if in fact it was only man who sinned?
* Read Rom 8:18-25. Why do you think God chose to subject all of creation to frustration? When, according to this passage will creation be liberated from its bondage? What should be our big hope for which we are eagerly waiting?
* Read 1 Cor 15:12-28. What are the implications for us that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead? At what point will we be made alive (v22-23; see also v52)? How can we reconcile the fact that when we die, our souls go to be with Jesus and yet according to this passage we are not made alive until later?
* Read 1 Cor:35-58. The seed that is sewn is not the same as the life which will spring from it, but is there a relationship? Consider for example the acorn and the oak? What are the things which encourage you?
* Why is it important to know the inheritance that God has planned for us?

**Prayers & reminders**

* Pray for The Williams family – Freddie has had a serious relapse
* 18 Dec Carol Service at Fountain Court
* 25 Dec Christmas Day Service 3/4hr 10.30am
* New Year Prayer: 4 & 5 Jan: Friday 8-9pm; Saturday 9-10am, 2-3pm and 7-8pm