



Some thoughts for the start of a New Year

Reflections on the book of Joshua

At the start of this New Year and as we look to the future, I thought it may be good to share some thoughts with you from the book of Joshua.

First I want to look back (the context of where we are today) – and then consider what God is calling us to now...

LOOKING BACK OVER THE LAST 2 YEARS

2007 was the year of God's promise: of listening and receiving fresh vision

After several years of what felt like increasing barrenness, God spoke clearly to me in 2007 that he had new work for us to do as musicians.



The people of Israel faced a similar situation when Joshua became their new leader after Moses' death. They had left Egypt some 40 years earlier and had been wandering in the wilderness. They were desperate to hear the voice of the Lord again and to see God's promises to them fulfilled. When he became leader God spoke to Joshua and said that He was now calling them to enter the Promised Land:

"I will give you every place where you set your foot... No-one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave or forsake you. Be strong and very courageous... Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:3-9)

In response, Joshua sent some spies into the land who reported back to him:

"The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us." (Joshua 2:24)

Applying this to our situation, in 2007 a number of us began exploring possibilities as individuals and in conversations together. We looked at the state of the nation and the church and realised afresh that the musical gifts God had given us were tools God could use to reach hearts and minds of people today. We believed that God was calling us into territory currently occupied by the enemy to be carriers of the Kingdom of God.

2008 was 'the Year of the Gate' – a time of opportunity when God began opening doors/gates

God has opened many doors this past year. This has been a time of new growth and planting our feet firmly on the ground that God has promised us.

In Joshua 3, God miraculously brought the nation across the Jordan into the Promised Land:

Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you... the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you... as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing... So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground." (Joshua 3: 9-17)

God has clearly been at work amongst us this year. It is encouraging to see how much has come together in such a short space of time as well as to see the creativity and diversity of various initiatives. Over the last 12 months the Musicians Network was formed and now has nearly 150 on the mailing list. Of these over 70 have attended at least one gathering which have been in several parts of the country. As a result, many have felt much more confident in their faith as they play in their various orchestras & ensembles and a number have been able to share their faith more freely with their colleagues.



Here are just a few examples of new initiatives taken over the last few months - Christopher Poffley's valentine's concert, Bach suites at Easter, playing in the city of London; Gill Sutton and Sally Hosken several times on the streets of Guildford and playing at conferences; Pete & Shirley Richards putting on local community concerts; John Kane out on the streets regularly with fresh vision for the future; outreach recitals by Corinne Frost; Amelie Addison's recital at Trinity and her current dissertation; Julia out on the streets of Cardiff; Charlotte Wilson playing for homeless people in Manchester; Rachel Ellis, Judith Souter and Lou Bradbury in the streets of Horsham; the amazing coming together of the Winchester conference – and many more....

Several of us in the newly formed 'epiphany' group have been involved in a number of exploratory, creative events this year. Others have continued their involvement in longer established groups such as Face2face, the New English Orchestra, Kings Chamber Orchestra and Adoramus Orchestra.

LOOKING AHEAD

2009 is a year of looking for strategy, taking new ground & initiative, consecrating ourselves & acting obediently

We have made a good start. However, the vision God has given to us is to move out and continue to take ground that the enemy now occupies (*"I will give you every place where you set your foot"* – Joshua 1:3). We are to take the initiative if we are to see the Kingdom of God advancing. God has given us weapons (our gifts and our heart of worship). We must use these in faith if we are to see further change.

Strategy - taking new ground – initiative:



We need specific leading and instruction from the Lord if we are to take ground currently held by the enemy. We are in a war - and just as the musicians were often prominent in times of battle (as an example see 2 Chron 20:20-23), so our gifts of music, praise and worship are important weapons in the hand of the Lord.

The Lord instructed the Israelites to take the land around them. Strategy was important and they obeyed the Lord's specific instructions for each place:

Here are 2 examples from the book of Joshua:

1. In Jericho they were to march round once each day for 6 days, then on the 7th day to march round 7 times with priests blowing ram's horns/trumpets:

"When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city." (Joshua 6:20)

2. When God told Joshua to attack Ai, Joshua instructed 30 thousand of his best fighting men to set an ambush behind the city. Then Joshua & others advanced on the city and lured the men out. Joshua held out his javelin towards Ai, and the 30 thousand attacked the city and set it on fire, totally destroying it.

"As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire." (Joshua 8: 19)

Each battle was fought according to specific instructions. So it must be with us! You can see other examples in Joshua 10 and 11.

Who is in charge? – issues of control (a warning):

Much of what has been achieved this year is as result of us taking initiatives as led by God's Spirit. The danger now, some of us having jumped over the hurdle of indifference or fear, is that we take control back again and start working out our God-given vision in the flesh. There is no quicker way of losing God's favour and anointing than us taking charge again of how a vision develops. We can make our plans and even build a ministry, with programmes, initiatives, good ideas and busy-ness – but without God all we gain is a human structure, with little fruit and potential burnout!

Right from the start, God has reminded us that although the destination he has for us is a glorious and fruitful one, the steps we take and the road ahead will only be revealed bit by bit as we stay humble and walk in step with the Spirit.

"Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Galatians 3:3)

So, we must take initiative (as Christopher Poffley said in the summer, this is a time to be 'mildly aggressive'!), but that initiative must be grounded in our relationship with God and our openness to his Spirit.

Consecration and obedience:



We are to remain consecrated and obedient to God. As soon as the people crossed into the Promised Land, Joshua required that they consecrated themselves again with all the males being circumcised (Joshua 5).

Consecration and confession of sin must be ongoing; otherwise our work will not succeed. When Achan sinned by stealing some of the 'devoted things' after the battle of Jericho, the Israelites were routed when they first attacked the town of Ai:

"But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel." (Joshua 7:1)

There was sin in the camp which had to be confessed and dealt with - then the people had to re-consecrate themselves. Consecration and obedience were crucial if the people were to have victory. So it will be with us. Our ongoing personal relationship and walk with God, and quick confession of sin, will be crucial if we are going to have success.

SEEKING GOD'S KINGDOM

So what else is God saying to us in a time when many are fearful and unsure of the future?:

*"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**"* (Matthew 6: 25-33)

We are to seek God's Kingdom above all other priorities. The promise is that if we do this God will provide for all our needs - which is an important message when a number of us may be fearful about our work given current economic climate.

As I look back over the last year I'm excited by all that God has done amongst us. Many people have fresh impetus & passion. But God is saying:

Don't settle or be complacent. You must move on in the calling I have given each of you. There is more, but you must seek my face for the next steps by deepening your relationship with me.

If we're honest with ourselves, could we be described as:

- Predictable?
- Complacent?
- Satisfied?
- Comfortable?

Are we satisfied with our comfortable job, our family, our ministry & achievements – do we make space in our lives to regularly spend time listening to God. Do we expect Jesus to challenge us and to stir us up – or do we want a nice easy life? Our lives are not our own any more.

Phil 3: 12-16 – challenges us to press on and not be satisfied:

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.”



Also Proverbs 3: 5-6

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

If we rely on our own understanding to find the way forwards, we will miss what God wants to do. We need to trust Him to show us... with all our heart.

Heb 10: 22-24 encourages us to keep holy, to keep holding on to hope, to keep spurring one another on to love & good deeds, to keep meeting together and to keep encouraging one another:

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

AND FINALLY

May this coming year be one where we see God continuing to work in and through us. Let us remain prayerful, supportive of each other, courageous - and above all, obedient and faithful in our walk with God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us... (Eph 3:20)

Richard Williamson