

Service Transcript

Bible Sunday 2021

Welcome, notices, birthday box

O Sing to the Lord a new song;

Sing to the Lord, all the earth!

For behold, I am doing a new thing, says your God.

And this we long to see and embrace.

Do not be afraid, says your God.

We come before our God with expectancy and hope!

Come, let us worship God.

426 O Lord our God, how majestic is Your name

Today is our annual Bible Sunday Service, when we celebrate God's written word and look at the work of Bible Society particularly against the background of a world in pandemic. We are going to do that through looking at a few stories Bible Society's work in the last year and having a few times of reflection, when we read a verse- reflect briefly on it and then pray.

So what is Bible Society about. Here's Dai Woolridge to tell us more.

Video: Introduction to Bible Sunday 2021 – Dai Woolridge

Read: *So also will be the word that I speak — it will not fail to do what I plan for it; it will do everything I send it to do. (Isaiah 55.11, GNB)*

Think: How is Bible reading part of my life each day? Am I listening to what God is saying through his word?

Pray: **Lord God, the Bible is a gift that brings truth, hope and freedom to our lives. Help me to hunger and thirst for your words. Amen.**

CHINA

Our first story today is from China. PIC 1 It's not very often a preacher has to scale a cliff to get into his pulpit. But that is the kind of terrain that Pu Zhi-dui must overcome. Zhi-dui oversees eight churches and the 2,000 believers he ministers to are spread out in the mountains of China. PIC 2 Rural preachers like 50-year-old Zhi-dui can go on foot for several hours to reach a congregation, trekking narrow paths and crossing streams. At times, landslides and falling rocks mean they even have to scale cliffs – imagine your pastor having to do that to get to you on a Sunday!

PIC 3 When a Bible Society team visited, Zhi-dui was waving his hands about as he preached passionately at a church 1,900 metres above sea level in Fugong county. He was drawing from John chapter 1, 'The light of Christ keeps shining in the dark, and darkness has never put it out.'

It's estimated 1 million people come to faith every year in China. Many Christians have little or no guidance or pastoral care. This means some may be vulnerable to stumbling in their faith. That's why it's so important right now to provide church leadership training and scholarships for young Bible students to follow in the footsteps of preachers like Zhi-dui.

Prayer: Thank you, God, that so many are coming to Christ in China. Please give courage, strength and wisdom to ministers such as Zhi-dui. Please motivate more and more Christians like him to enter this challenging mission field. Amen

Read: All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living. (2 Timothy 3.16, GNB)

Think: We are fortunate in their country to have good Bible knowledge and training available. So let's think: are you engaging with the Bible in the best way you can? Do you take time to consider how you might need to respond to what you've read? Let's come before God in the silence for a few moments to reflect on this Let's pray.

Pray: Thank you God for inspiring all the authors of the books in the Bible. Thank you for the Bible. Help me to grow in wisdom and understanding. Please let your gracious word convict, inspire and help me today. Amen.

NIGER Our second story is from Niger in West Africa

PIC 1 The West African country of Niger is one of the poorest in the world. Its people have had to deal with not only poverty, but also the pandemic, deadly floods and the constant threat of Islamist terrorism. Hama Yaye leads Bible mission in this country where 98 per cent of the population is Muslim. Hama says Bible work can easily be stopped if Christians are too bold in their outreach. One year, a government official announced that Christmas was cancelled! But Hama says Christians are respected as being upright citizens.

PIC 2

Once, Hama was riding a motorbike with a Bible strapped on the back. Some guards stopped him. He feared the worst. They asked for his papers. But then they saw the Bible and let Hama through because they believed he could be trusted. Hama said, 'That was a real answer to prayer, because it turned out I had actually forgotten to bring my ID documents with me!' Hama said the biggest problem in Niger is a low level of training among church leaders. And with only one in five people able to read and write, these Christians need help to understand their Bibles. PIC 3 But there's hope. Bible Society supporters recently raised enough funds to provide Hama's team with a 4x4 vehicle so he can more easily reach isolated communities waiting for God's word. And with further support, Bible schools will be provided with the training resources they desperately need.

Prayer: We pray for courage, strength and protection for Hama in Niger as he perseveres with his challenging and often dangerous ministry. We ask you Lord to bless Bible Society's plans to help Christians in Niger go deeper with the Scriptures, so their lives will be shaped by the gospel. Amen.

Read: As you have promised, keep me from falling; don't let me be overcome by evil. (Psalm 119.133, GNB)

Think: Hama works in an country where his life and liberty is in potential danger. He must walk closelt with God. In what way can you walk more closely with God? Identify a key step you can take. Let's come before God in the silence for a few moments to reflect on this Let's pray.

Pray: Dear Father, direct my steps in the wisdom found in the Bible. Prevent me from stumbling and help me to live in a way that honours you. Amen.

As we look at such a needy world that so needs words of life, lets sing our second song today where we remember that in Christ we see beauty come out of brokenness in lives changd by Him.

664 Beauty for Brokenness

LEBANON

PIC 1

Last year, the Bible Society of Lebanon asked for prayer after the chemical blast in the capital Beirut that killed more than 200 people and left 7,500 injured. This year God answered those prayers. Bible worker Camille Safar told us this: 'Thanks to all the prayers and support received we were able to repair the Bible Society Centre and continue with our ministry. Free Scriptures were distributed to people affected by the explosion to help them gain hope again.' PIC 2 Almost 9,000 Bibles or Scripture portions were distributed free or highly subsidised to families whose homes were damaged in the blast. Thousands of Bibles were also reduced dramatically in price to make them more accessible to a population affected by rampant inflation and poverty. Camille said that shifting to online ministry during the pandemic enabled the Bible mission team in Lebanon to reach many more young people.

PIC 3

He said, 'They were thirsty to know more about Jesus and engage with the Scriptures.' He said that in the first quarter of 2020 before the pandemic took hold 2,100 young people were reached online. Whereas in the first quarter of this year it was almost 20 times the amount with 40,000 young people engaging with the Scriptures online! There is no doubt that in Lebanon, despite the poverty there, the seeds are being sown.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the amazing response of young people in Lebanon to hearing your word. Please let the seeds sown in their hearts grow so that they will form a real relationship with Jesus. We pray that more people will turn to you in Lebanon. Amen.

Read: *So also will be the word that I speak — it will not fail to do what I plan for it; it will do everything I send it to do. (Isaiah 55.11, GNB)*

Think: We have heard how people in Lebanon are enthusiastic to read God's word. How is Bible reading part of my life each day? Am I listening to what God is saying through his word? Let's come before God in the silence for a few moments to reflect on this Let's pray.

Pray: Lord God, the Bible is a gift that brings truth, hope and freedom to our lives. Help me to hunger and thirst for your words. Amen.

NIGERIA

PIC 1

Not even a pandemic can stop Bible mission! Imagine being able to read the Bible in your own language. Well, probably all of you can, because it is likely you read and write English. It's not like

that everywhere, though. In Nigeria, a Christian named Miss Abraham Montgomery said: 'I've been praying for this day. It is no longer a wish or a dream, but a reality. The people of other languages in our neighbouring states have the Bible in their mother tongue, and I am happy we now have ours.' And Miss Montgomery, who was celebrating a translation into the Epie language, is not the only one praising the Lord for receiving a Bible in her mother tongue.

PIC 2

Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, Bible Societies around the world completed translations of Scripture into 66 languages used by 707 million people last year. Six language groups received the full Bible for the very first time – five in Africa and the other in the USA, where the Deaf community celebrated the completion of the American Sign Language Bible. PIC 3 Juliet Clarkson, also in Nigeria, told us: 'It will make evangelism easier. When we go out to preach to people, they do not understand the English Bible, but now we will be reading the Bible and preaching in the Epie language.'

Prayer: Thank you God that not even a great pandemic can stop your word from reaching millions of people. We pray that in the future every single person in the whole world will have access to the Bible in their own language. Amen.

Read: *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12.9, ESV)*

Think: Do you always remember to fall back on God and his grace during difficult times? Let's come before God in the silence for a few moments to reflect on this Let's pray.

Pray: Thank you God for giving Bible workers the world over the strength and courage to continue their missions during the pandemic. Please Lord, keep the outposts spreading your word open during this challenging period. Amen.

2032 *Speak O Lord*

Sermon - Joseff Edwards (see separate sermon sheets) based on Isaiah 55:1-11

1702 *Amazing Grace (my chains fell off)*

Prayer – time of open prayer for those that need a touch from God.

Song: *May the Lord shine on you (Andy Rayner)*

For Reflection & Discussion

Based on Isaiah 55:1-11. Do read or watch Joseff Edwards' sermon on our website.

1. What has it been like for you to have come out of Lockdown?

Read Isaiah 55:1-3

2. In what ways does God provide for the different kinds of thirst we have in life?

Read verses 5-7

3. What is the nature of the call God gives us as His people today? What message do we speak?

Read verses 10-11

4. What sorts of things are we afraid of as we seek to reach out to others after the pandemic? How does this passage help?