

Assembly 27 October 2008

Buried Treasure and a Precious Book

Yesterday was Bible Sunday.

In churches across Hong Kong, people celebrated this special day by focusing on the theme 'Buried Treasure: unearthing God's riches'. The theme was based on Psalm 119 and people, young and old, were invited to unearth the riches of the whole Bible in order to know God better and to live His way.

Psalm 119 is one of the most important and beautiful in the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament of the Bible.

It begins:

- Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.
- Blessed are those who keep his decrees, who seek Him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in His ways.
- You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.
- That my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!

The word 'precept' means a rule or principle that requires you to take a certain course of action. Of course, you have heard the word 'precept' on many occasions as it is in our College Song:

*Justice, Honour, Truth and Virtue, shall the watchwords be for all.
We thy sons who learnt these precepts in the College of St. Paul.*

In Psalm 119 we are asked to keep God's Laws and in so doing we will be blessed in this life and beyond.

Bible Sunday was first held in churches worldwide in 1904, some 104 years ago. Bible Sunday is run by the Bible Society, a Christian charity that exists to enable the Bible to be read and heard throughout the world. There are many branches of the Bible Society but is particularly active in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. Most of the work of the Bible Society is carried out in countries where English is not the first language. The aim is to make the Bible available in a language that the local people can understand and at a price that they can afford.

One part of the world where the Bible Society is particularly active is China. As the number of believers on the Mainland and in Hong Kong increases rapidly, so too does the need for the Bibles. Churches throughout China are crying out for more Bibles so that the growing number of worshippers can access God's word. The word of God, as written in the Scriptures, is the foundation of the Christian faith and needs to be readily and easily available.

It is a fact of life, however, that many Christians living in poor rural and urban areas of China are not in a position to buy a Bible. Indeed, some churches do not have a single Bible to share amongst their believers. This is why the Bible Society is so active in its mission to spread the word of God.

Of course, the mission does not start or end in China. Although there have been hundreds of translations of the Bible, with many more in preparation, there remain many thousands of languages into which the Bible has yet to be translated. Furthermore, many millions on this earth cannot read, necessitating the Bible to be available in audio format. For those who cannot see, the Bible is written in Braille.

While the task of the Bible Society is great and might at times appear impossible, the Word of God does manage to live on from generation to generation.

This morning I would like show you a book that only a small number of people at our school will have seen before.

This is a very precious book; so precious that it is kept in a special box used for storing archives and I must not touch it without wearing gloves to protect its pages. This is a book of the Christian Liturgy, that is, a book of Worship to be used in Church Services. The book is printed in Chinese but on the cover is written by hand the following words:

Liturgy in Chinese
St. Paul's College
Hongkong
July 1855

This is the oldest item of St. Paul's College history that we possess. Indeed, it is almost 100 years older than any other book in our possession. It is likely that the handwriting on the cover is that of the Bishop of Victoria and the Principal of our College, George Smith.

This book is exciting in terms of its historical significance. Yet, it should come as no surprise to those with Faith that the oldest and most treasured item in our school is a book of worship that praises the Word of God, used some 153 years ago by boys and teachers of St. Paul's College.

J.R. Kennard