

THE WORK OF THE MEASBRO DYKE CONGREGATION IN BARNSELEY

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Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ is the elect of God out of all nations, called and gathered by Christ through the preaching of the gospel by the power of His Holy Spirit. In Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Christ's church is to be found in the Measbro Dyke congregation.

Barnsley is a densely populated town of some 250,000 souls. It is typical of many other northern towns in England but is undergoing many changes. Coal mining, together with its supporting industries, is no longer the major employer that it once was and, since the miners' strike of 1984, many mines have closed. After a period of high unemployment, when at one time 23% of the workforce were out of work, we are now seeing much improvement. Smaller manufacturing industries are moving into the town and new factories are being opened, many on the sites of disused coal mines. On the employment scene, the prospects for our younger people are brighter than for many years.

Spiritually speaking, Barnsley is a barren area. We have all the problems associated with large towns and cities, particularly on our large council housing estates. Vandalism and violent crime continue to increase. We have one of the lowest crime detection rates in the country, especially regarding crime in our town centre where much of this is drug and alcohol related. Sadly, there is little true gospel preaching in the town. The predominant religious influences are Roman Catholicism and Anglo Catholicism, and we have several large Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. The older nonconformist chapels are liberal and ecumenical.

It is against this background that the Measbro Dyke church worships the true and living God, seeking to maintain a testimony to the Reformed Faith, which is Biblical Christianity.

Historically, our roots go back to 1875. For the greater part of

the time we were a congregation within the Methodist tradition and, until 1975, were affiliated to the Wesleyan Reform Union of Churches. In 1972 I was called as the first pastor and in 1975 the church was reconstituted as an Independent Evangelical Church. The decision to secede from the Wesleyan Reform Union was on the grounds of increasing apostasy and ecumenical activity on the part of that Union of Churches.

From 1975 onwards the church has sought to grow and develop as a Reformed church. Over more recent years we have had many struggles as we have sought to maintain a distinctive testimony, not walking in the popular moderate Calvinism of our times which embraces the errors of 'Common Grace' and the 'Free Offer of the Gospel.' After a period of struggle and unrest, the Lord in His sovereign mercy and goodness has been pleased to grant us peace and once again there are signs of growth in our midst.

Measbro Dyke Congregation: Local Church Life

The congregation at Measbro Dyke is made up of nine families and six individuals. We are some 35 souls in all and the communicant membership stands at 23.

We believe that Christ is the Head of the church and that He has placed the oversight of the congregation into the hands of elders and deacons. At Measbro Dyke that, for the present, means the Pastor and Board of Deacons. We believe that men only are called of Christ and appointed to the oversight of the local congregation.

We are only a small congregation, which has certain advantages but also presents some difficulties. Nevertheless, we seek by God's enabling to maintain a full local church life.

The Lord's Day is the principal day of the week, the day of rest and gladness. We have two worship services and these are marked by simplicity and, we trust, solemnity. The principal parts of worship we conceive to be: Praise, Prayer and Preaching. Our praise consists of the singing of hymns and psalms with musical accompaniment. Prayers are extempore and preaching is the exposition of a shorter or longer portion of the Scriptures. We seek to be Scriptural throughout, maintaining a balance of doctrinal, devotional, experimental and practical preaching. Much emphasis is laid upon fundamental truths, the distinctives of the Reformed Faith.

The afternoon of the Lord's Day is devoted to Sunday School and Bible Class. The Sunday School caters, not only for the young

people of the congregation under sixteen years of age, but also for several children from the neighbourhood. The Sunday School has seen much growth in the past two years. One member of the church was first contacted through her son attending the Sunday School. She was brought to conversion and is now an active member of the congregation.

Our midweek activities consist of a Bible Study and Prayer Meeting on a Thursday evening and we have around twenty members at this meeting. The format used is the lecture method, working through some particular book of the Bible or dealing in more depth with some aspect of doctrine. The prayers at the meeting are led by two or three male members of the congregation.

Measbro Dyke Congregation: Evangelism

As a church, we take seriously the work of evangelism. Of the church of Christ at Thessalonica, Paul wrote: "From you sounded out the word of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 1:8). This is what we seek to do in the locality of our church in the town.

Our church building is situated very well on a busy main road out of the town. At the front of the church we have a board upon which are displayed the times of our worship services and we also have the facilities to display Scripture texts, which we call 'wayside pulpits.' Many passing the church have their attention drawn to these Scripture posters which are changed every month.

Within the immediate neighbourhood of the church we distribute Scripture leaflets and booklets published by the Trinitarian Bible Society. On other occasions we print a brief tract ourselves upon which we place the times of our services. We have also engaged in door-to-door visitation and open-air preaching in the town shopping area. We use the local press to advertise our services and on several occasions have had the opportunity of writing a short article on a specific doctrine which has appeared in the 'Barnsley Chronicle.'

Over the years we have found Easter and Christmas to be special occasions for gathering the unchurched into our services. At these seasons of the year, which are also public holidays, we make a point of distributing some suitable Scripture leaflet and an invitation to our services. We know that in the world and in the false church there is much superstition and foolishness at these times but, without engaging in such foolishness, we seek to use these occasions in a positive way. We have been encouraged at the

numbers of outsiders who will come along to a church service at these seasons. On these occasions we seek to preach those vital fundamental truths of the Christian faith – the Virgin Birth (Incarnation), the Atoning Death and the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ – truths so blatantly denied by the so-called Christian leaders of our churches in England.

All these means of bringing God's Word, the Gospel of Christ, to men and women are dependent upon the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit. We preach and distribute the Word but God alone can give the increase. We have found that in getting people to come to our services to listen to preaching, there is no substitute for personal friendliness and personal invitation extended by every member to others.

Measbro Dyke Congregation: Our Distinctive Witness

We are not Arminian! Our distinctive witness is to the Reformed Faith: the Doctrines of Grace and historic Calvinism. The background against which we work, however, is not a Reformed tradition and it is doubtful whether there has ever been a witness to the Reformed Faith in our town. Those who attend our worship services from other church backgrounds come from either a ritualist, liberal or evangelical Arminian tradition.

Within the church building we have a free literature table upon which are found a good number of booklets explaining the distinctive doctrines of the Reformed Faith. Many of these booklets are supplied from sources within the Protestant Reformed Churches of America and the making of this literature available to our people in Barnsley and to visitors to the church, has led to a more widespread distribution than we could ever have imagined.

We have been pleased to welcome into the church and into our homes many folk from the Protestant Reformed Churches. On several occasions, visits from ministers have provided opportunities to hold Reformed conferences at Measbro Dyke to which friends in England, who love Reformed truth, have gathered for instruction and encouragement.

In the eyes of much of the church world this may seem to be of little significance or importance. We rejoice, however, in this work which the Lord has given us to do in these last days of apostasy and unbelief.

Measbro Dyke Congregation: the Future

We stand amazed at what God has done so far in our midst,

although the future is uncertain. Will God maintain the cause of truth, or will our congregation go the way of so many others, that of compromise and then denial? We cannot remain standing still. We know that a Reformed church must be always reforming. There is a need for growth and development in the truth, both in our individual lives and in the life of the congregation.

Our calling is clear: To stand firm in the truth, to preach the truth and to contend for the truth. May the God of all grace be pleased to keep us faithful to our calling. We lift up our heads, looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory and longing for that Day when all the ransomed church of God shall be saved to sin no more.

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES [*Continued from page 1*]

It is further true that God's Word must be preached to all nations (Matthew 28:19), so that where God has given new life there would be seen the proper response: true conversion. The Word of God declares: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved..." (Acts 16:31). That is the promise of the gospel which has never yet failed, nor ever will!

THE COVENANT OF GRACE [*Continued from page 27*]

And we must certainly bear in mind that this is not a mere revelation in words; but it is indeed a living reality for man himself. When God establishes His covenant with His people, He does not simply tell them about it, but He takes them into His own covenant life. He causes men to share in the joy and happiness of His own fellowship. He gives to man the taste of the greatness of His own communion and friendship. And when this is accomplished through the wonder of divine grace, then and then only is there the reality for us of this glorious covenant of which we speak.

To enter into God's own life of fellowship will stand eternally as the incomprehensible wonder of our salvation!

[To be continued]