

“TAKING ENCOURAGEMENT WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH”

John Stevens, National Director of the FIEC, addressed the second Pastor Training International (PTI)/Christian Books Worldwide (CBW) at Freshbrook Evangelical Church, Swindon, on 11 May. The theme of the conference was “Strengthening the Church in the Poorest Places on Earth”.

PTI exists to provide teaching and resources for pastors in the poorest parts of the world. It specialises in running in-country training conferences, distance mentoring from the UK and learning resources for self-study by pastors.

CBW provides evangelistic and teaching books in English and many other languages for the growing church in the developing world and to alleviate the desperate shortage of suitable theological books in Asia and Africa.

Taking as his text Luke 13: 22-30 (the narrow door), John Stevens reminded the 70 or so conference delegates that times are undeniably hard for the Gospel in the UK right now, with Gospel believers making up only 3% of the population and that number hardly growing at all. Might this mean that salvation is only for the few?

The first half of the passage appears to indicate that few will find the narrow door. But John then explained how verses 24-27 (especially verse 26) referred to the response of the Jewish people to the earthly ministry of Jesus and the apostles of the early church, when relatively small numbers responded to Christ and were saved (as Paul also explains in Romans 9-11). But verses 28-30 indicate that there will be a great world-wide salvation, as people from every corner of the globe come to share in Christ’s enormous banquet. So the guests are no longer just the Jews, to whom Christ and Paul first went, but gentile believers from East and West, North and South. And Christ’s purpose will undoubtedly be accomplished.

What does this mean for PTI and CBW, as they carry on with the hard task of building up the church in some of the poorest and most remote places on earth?

John Stevens set four keynote challenges before the conference:

1. Even though gospel ministry is hard and painfully slow in our secular and increasingly post-Christian country we should not be discouraged and downhearted. Rather we should all be greatly encouraged that the Gospel is triumphing in many, many other places around the world (Colossians 1v6). This should give us confidence to persevere in our own ministry and evangelism.
2. We should support our brothers and sisters around the world as they fulfill his command to make disciples of all nations, recognizing that we are in a position to give them two vital ingredients that they lack - training expertise and money.
3. We must be urgent about the work. Jesus made clear that the Jews of his generation had a brief window of opportunity to respond to the gospel. The door was narrow and would soon be shut. Whilst the door of opportunity today is wide, because we live in the post resurrection "day of salvation," this too will be closed on the "day of the Lord" when Jesus returns in glory (see 2 Corinthians 5v11-6v2)
4. Finally, despite the depressing spiritual state of the UK right now, we must remain hopeful about our nation. We are amongst the nations that Jesus had in view in v28-30. Jesus said that people would come from all points of the compass, and that includes our country which would have been "north west" from Israel! That means perhaps asking for help from our brothers and sisters overseas to 'reverse evangelise' Britain; it is marvelous that so many Christians overseas have that vision for us. And, as a priority, it means developing closer fellowship and gospel cooperation that reflects the many multi-ethnic Christian communities that have made their home in the UK.

More information on **Pastor Training International** may be found at www.pastor-training.org/

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