

## Vision

The first part of St James' vision statement is "to win people for Christ" and the first part of our aim is "to be a church **praying** that the Lord would open the hearts of many to believe;"

How does this fit with what we have seen in this study?

Is this something you do often and if so who do you pray for?

Do you think we are good at doing this as a Church?

## Prayer

Logically, from the passages we have seen, since it is God who brings people to faith we should make prayer a priority. Curiously, although you may be able to think of an example, I am not aware of any record in the Bible of people praying for the conversion of the others.

Nevertheless, I suggest you spend time praying for people you know and for our outreach into the community around St. James. The following passages may help to shape your prayers.

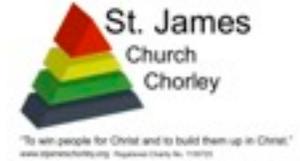
Pray that:

- the Lord would draw people to Christ (John 6.4).
- He would open the hearts of people to believe (Acts 16.14).
- God would give the gift of faith (Eph 2.8).
- that as we seek to obey His command to tell others about Christ so the Holy Spirit would guide us (Acts 16.6-7)
- as we tell others about Jesus so the hand of the Lord would be with us and many would believe (Acts 11.21).
- God would send out labourers into the harvest (Mtt 9.38).

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## Vision

### Study 1 : Unless the Lord builds the house...



*This is the first of a series of studies shaped by the St James' vision agreed by the Church Council. God willing there will be four studies before half-term and we will return to the series after Easter and in the autumn. In this study we will look briefly at several Bible passages rather than study one or two in depth - you might like to spend more time reflecting on some of the passages in preparation or during the following week. There will also be a sermon on each study.*

### Go ...

In this study we are looking mainly at the work of God in bringing people to faith in Christ. However, start by reminding yourselves of some of the commands given to followers of Christ. How should they shape our desire as individuals and our work as a Church?

Matthew 28.18-20

Luke 24.46-48

Acts 1.8

### Unless the Lord builds the house

#### Read John 1.6-13

Try to pick out from these verses what is involved in someone becoming a disciple of Christ.

- What was the task of John the Baptist and how does that relate to our task today?
- What is said about what a person must do? (eg v12) (Contrast this with those who do not follow Christ in v 11.)
- What is said about the work of God in the coming of Jesus and in the lives of individuals?

In what ways, and in what situations can you be a witness today?

Do you find this easy?

*(The Greek word translated witness is 'marturia'. The cost of witnessing to Christ for John and many others was such that it has come into English with a specific meaning - martyrs.)*

### **Born again : Read John 3.1-8**

How does Jesus describe becoming a Christian in these verses?

Can we be a Christian without being born again? Notice how this ties in with what John wrote in chapter 1 verse 13.

Some people dislike the expression 'born again' why do you think this is?

What is the particular role of the Holy Spirit described here?

What does Jesus mean by what He says in verse 8?

*(The root Greek word for born in 1.13 and 3.4 is genao from which we get words like genesis and generation.)*

*Don't forget that later in this conversation Jesus made plain the importance of believing - if we believe we are not condemned, if we do not believe in the name of God's one and only Son we are condemned already (3.17).*

### **Read Titus 3.3-7**

How does Paul describe what we were? Do you think this is fair?

What did God do, and in particular what was the work of the Holy Spirit?

What does Paul say here that we did, or rather didn't do?

*(This time the Greek word translated rebirth is paliggenesias and is more usually translated as regeneration. Regeneration is the term used by theologians to describe being born again.)*

### **Read Acts 16.6-15**

What does verse 6 say that Paul and his friends were trying to do?

How did God guide them and why?

Notice that they were guided as they were seeking to obey the commands of the Lord we read at the start of this study. They were not sitting around waiting for guidance. (Although in a future study we will look at Acts 8 where the disciples seem to be slow to obey until something happened that forced them to do something - a great persecution arose.)

You may remember from the motto text sermon Paul's strategy in a new place (cf Acts 13.14-15) - see also Lk 4.16 for Jesus' 'custom'. Philippi was the first European city Paul had visited and apparently it did not have many Jews living there. How did Paul have to adapt his strategy?

Luke doesn't give much detail but what does he seem to indicate about Paul's approach in this informal setting compared to the formal opportunities to preach in a synagogue?

What part did Paul and his companions have in Lydia coming to faith?

What did the Lord do to Lydia?

Compare this with what Paul writes in Ephesians 2.8?

It is important to see that though the work is the Lord's we are called to be part of that work. We are not to sit back but to speak to others about Jesus.

What evidence do we see of God's work in Lydia? Briefly, are there other things the Bible says we might expect to see as the fruit of someone coming to faith?