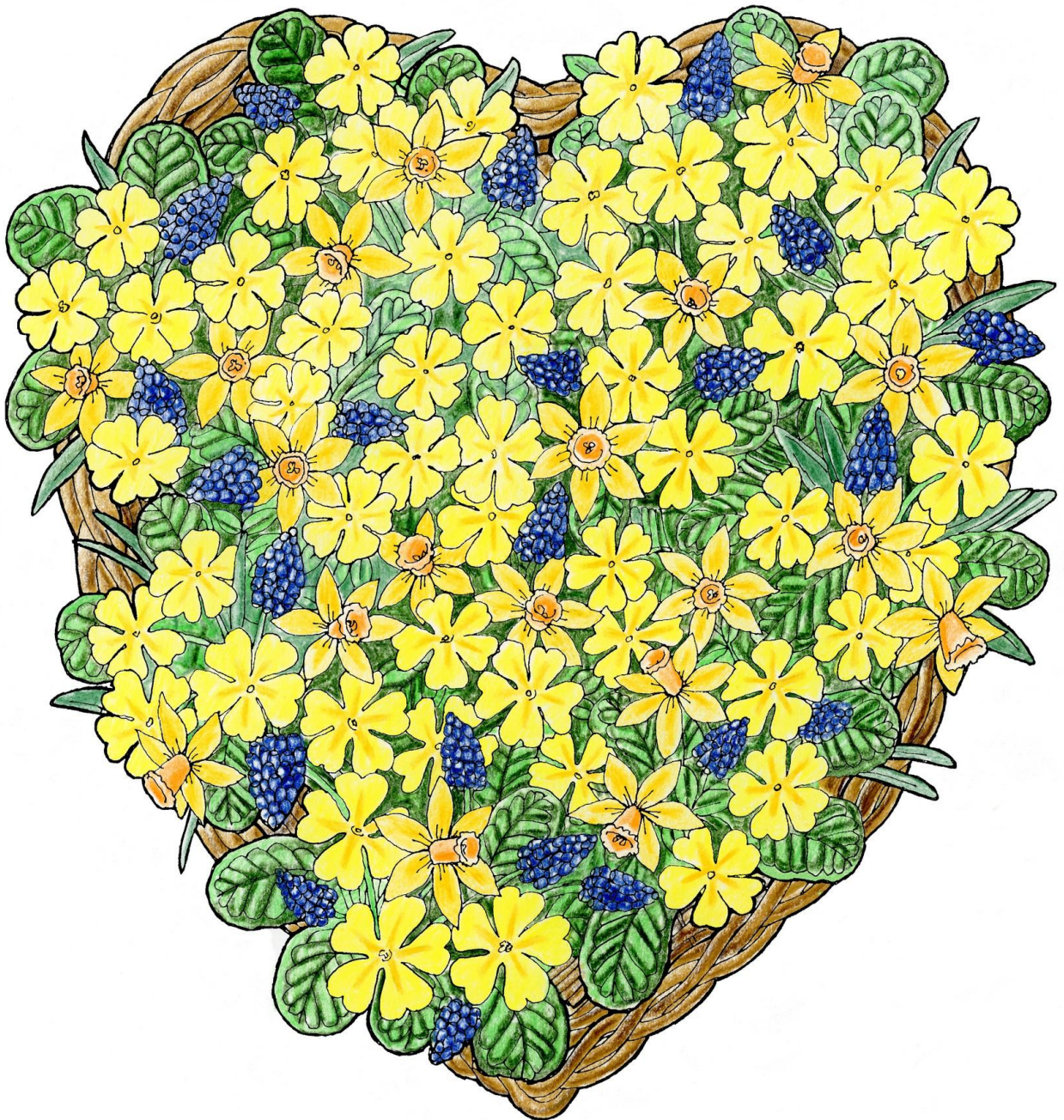




March
2026

THANK YOU



REDDITCH BAPTIST CHURCH – MARCH 2026

Acts is an interesting book – it's neither doctrine nor prophecy, which many people assume are the main topics of the Bible, nor is it telling us about Jesus, which must surely be the other main purpose of the Bible... Why should we be spending time with the ancient travelogs of Paul and some other blokes we don't really know anything about?

Well, hopefully you've discovered by now that there's a lot going on in Acts, but here are some of the lessons we can pick up from this book, which actually makes up over 10% of the NT...

We are part of a world-wide movement which started nearly 2000 years ago. Sometimes we get too distracted (or distressed) by what's going on here and now, and we forget that the church of Jesus has been through a lot more than what we see around us here in Redditch.

Some people don't think history has anything to teach us – I would beg to differ. If we want to understand who we are, or why we are where we are, history is essential. This applies to our history as a Baptist church, our history as a church in England, or our history as a Protestant church – and it applies to our history as heirs of that movement that started when the Holy Spirit was poured out on some 120 believers in Jerusalem.

The early Christians weren't perfect. They misunderstood Jesus' command about mission; they assumed that Gentiles had to become Jews in order to follow Jesus; they had personal disagreements (in chapter 15 Paul and Barnabas fall out about whether John Mark deserved a second chance after abandoning them on the first mission trip). This might not seem very important, but I think it's well worth being aware that they weren't some kind of super-Christians: they made mistakes and fell short of the ideal, just like we do.

The early church persevered in the face of opposition. It didn't take long before the church in Jerusalem started feeling the pressure: the first arrest comes already in chapter 4, and the first (unlawful) execution in chapter 7. As Paul keeps travelling, the pressure mounts – initially from the Jewish community, but increasingly from the secular authorities, until the book ends with Paul in prison, awaiting trial.

And yet the gospel spread... because they all knew that Jesus was (and is) the King of kings, the rightful Ruler of everything, and that the earthly authorities that oppose this message will sooner or later crumble and fall, whether in due course from natural, historical causes, or through God's direct intervention (and I'm not sure to what extent you can separate those two anyway).

And one day Jesus is coming back in glory, something the entire NT keeps joyfully proclaiming over and over – even in Acts, even if it's not quite as frequent there as in the more doctrinal parts of the NT. That day will be the ultimate vindication for his church and all who have suffered for his name's sake. So don't give up, don't lose heart – and don't shift your allegiance away from Jesus your risen Lord, who unites us with Peter and Paul and every believer throughout the history of his world-wide church!

By the Revd Roy Shaw, a retired but active priest in the diocese of York, where he is a spiritual director.

Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday - the fourth Sunday of Lent- offers families an opportunity to honour the women who have nurtured them. Lots of different streams and traditions have come together to make today's Mothering Sunday the special day that it is.

In the Middle Ages it was an occasion for everyone to visit their 'mother' church - the place where they had been baptised. Later, an opportunity for those who worked away from home to visit their mothers became added to the mix of reasons to make it a special day.

Today we honour all women who have in one way or another been special to us, and in church this is usually signalled by small bunches of flowers for every woman present.

Treating mums and grans to Sunday lunch, chocolates and flowers is also part of the present mix. And will there be a simnel cake to be seen - a tradition from ages past - with its rich layers of marzipan, and eleven balls of marzipan on top, reminders of the 11 disciples who remained faithful to Jesus?

Not everyone has enjoyed a wonderful or enduring relationship with their mum, so lest we get carried away on a wave of love and sentimentality, there is usually space in the Mothering Sunday church service to reflect on and pray for those whose relationships with their mother were not all they might have been.

Also, there are the families blighted by the lack of, or death of a child; families remembering a mum who died tragically young; women who never had a child but would have dearly loved the opportunity; all these and more are a recognition of the imperfections of human love, human life.

These imperfections can be brought in prayer to the God who mothers us. In the Old Testament, Isaiah speaks of God comforting His people like a mother hen. In the New Testament, both Matthew and Luke bear witness to Jesus expressing His desire to gather His people as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings. Yes, God has strong maternal qualities which He invites us to discover and enjoy!

Have you discovered the mothering, nurturing, maternal qualities which God offers to all people? It's lovelier than flowers, more long-lasting than simnel cake, better than a visit from family, and it's free to everyone who wants it - it could be yours!



Nigel Beeton writes: The Psalm for the first Sunday of Lent is Psalm 32, which is a reflection on how forlorn our lives can be when we turn our backs on God, but how readily He forgives us when we confess our sins to Him. It ends on a note of praise, so I felt it right to add a doxology:

Blessed is the one
Whose sins have been forgiven him;
Blessed is the one
With no deceit or lies in him!

When I ignored the Lord
I groaned and cried the whole day long,
When I heard not His Word
My life was all so very wrong.

And so I came to Him
Confessing my iniquity;
Then He forgot my sin –
My faults were all forgiven me!

O come, ye faithful, come!
And seek the Lord this very day!
Salvation will be won!
Yes! He will take your sin away!

The Lord's unfailing love
Surrounds the one who Trusts in Him
Rejoice in God above!
And let your praises ever ring:

Our praises be to God!
And Jesus Christ for ever be!
The Spirit of the Lord!
All praises to the Trinity!

By Nigel Beeton

CAP turns 30, and looks back on tens of thousands of people freed from debt

The well-known charity Christians Against Poverty (CAP) is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

It was in Bradford, back in 1996, that a local Christian, John Kirkby, felt called to leave his career in finance, and use his knowledge to help local people deep in debt.

With a modest donation and a lot of faith, John set out to make himself available to parents who couldn't feed their children, families facing eviction and desperate people living without hope. John used his expertise to negotiate with creditors, set up budgeting systems and offer a lifeline to those trapped in debt.

But John knew that people all over the country were struggling in a similar way. And so he began looking to expand the work across the UK. With the vital ingredients of a church to partner with, a passionate person to be trained as a debt counsellor and the faith that God would provide, four new CAP centres were opened at the end of 1998.

Since then, CAP has rapidly grown its Debt Centre network, with services to tackle the causes of debt and poverty also introduced.

Its Debt Help department offers practical advice on how to live well on a low income, through CAP Life Skills groups, as well as supporting people stepping into employment through CAP Job Clubs. Through a UK-wide network of CAP projects, it has a vision of transformed lives, thriving churches and an end to UK poverty.

CAP has been accredited by the Money and Pensions Service, and it has won national awards for excellence. Over the past 30 years, it has helped tens of thousands of families and individuals to break free from debt and poverty.

Today CAP provides free debt counselling, job clubs, and life skills training through local churches. The service is open to anyone who needs it. Go to: <https://capuk.org>

National Gardening Week - 28th April to 4th May

Led by the Royal Horticultural Society, this annual premier UK celebration encourages everyone to experience the joy of gardening.

Aimed especially at beginners, events and activities are run up and down the country, offering tips, events, and resources to promote the health, wellbeing, and environmental benefits of cultivating plants. The RHS provides expert tips, how-to guides, and fun, easy gardening challenges to build confidence in new gardeners.

More at: <https://www.nationalgardeningweek.org.uk>

The
Tale of the
**TWO
BUILDERS**



JESUS OFTEN TOLD
STORIES WITH
HIDDEN MEANINGS



ONE WAS ABOUT TWO MEN WHO
BUILT THEIR OWN HOUSES

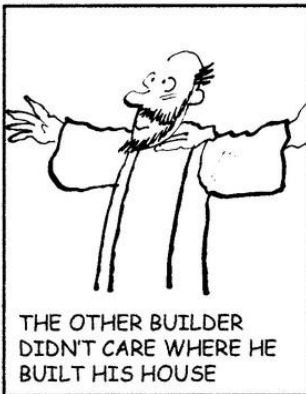


THE FIRST BUILDER SEARCHED HIGH
AND LOW FOR A GOOD SOLID ROCK ON
WHICH TO BUILD HIS HIS HOME.

AT LONG, LONG LAST HE
FOUND THE IDEAL SPOT.

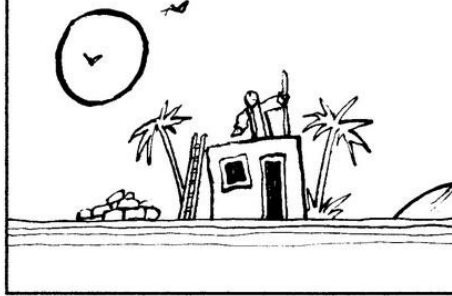


SO HE BEGAN TO BUILD.

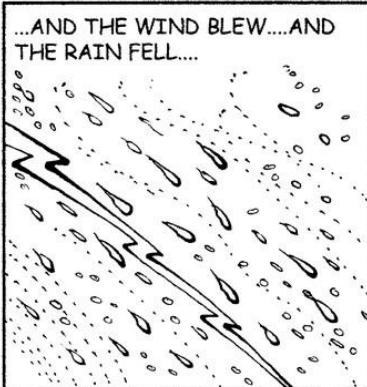


THE OTHER BUILDER
DIDN'T CARE WHERE HE
BUILT HIS HOUSE

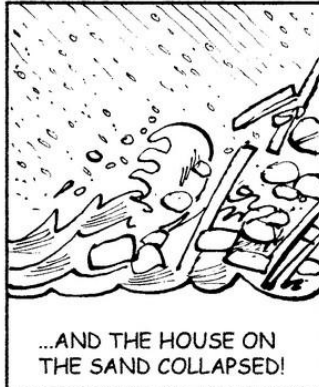
HE THOUGHT SOME NICE FLAT SAND
WOULD BE AN EASY PLACE TO BUILD.



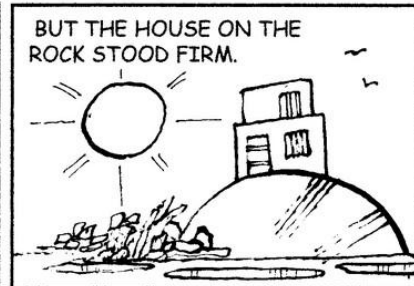
BUT ONE DAY THE
STORM CAME...



...AND THE WIND BLEW...AND
THE RAIN FELL...



...AND THE HOUSE ON
THE SAND COLLAPSED!



BUT THE HOUSE ON THE
ROCK STOOD FIRM.

JESUS EXPLAINED -
IT'S IMPORTANT OUR LIVES HAVE
A FIRM FOUNDATION.

Canon Paul Hardingham considers the crucifixion...

The Cross of Jesus

The cross is a picture of violence, yet the key to peace;

a picture of suffering, yet the key to healing;

a picture of death, yet the key to life;

a picture of utter weakness, yet the key to power;

a picture of capital punishment, yet the key to mercy and forgiveness;

a picture of vicious hatred, yet the key to love;

a picture of supreme shame, yet the Christian's supreme boast.

The cross really is the key to everything! Although a horrifying instrument of torture and death, it is also a symbol of God's love and peace. On the cross Jesus died to deal with the problem of our sin and defeat the powers of death and evil. He identified with our sufferings and set us an example of self-sacrificial love.

As Peter writes, *'He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed'* (1Peter 2:24). Jesus died in our place on the cross and took away our guilt, to pay the full penalty for our sin. Access to God's presence is now open to all, symbolised by the Temple curtain being torn in two from top to bottom. The barrier between us and God was torn down in order *'to bring us to God'* (1 Peter 3:18).

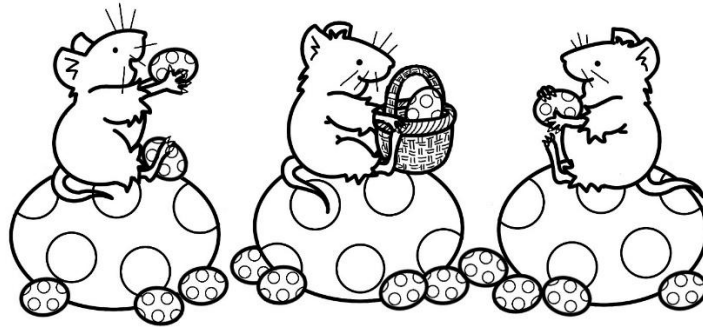
The idea of substitution lies at the heart of understanding what Jesus did on the cross: *'For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be.'* (John Stott).



Afternoon tea, anyone?

Do you take afternoon tea? Ever wondered where it started? The custom seems to date back to the mid-19th century, and the seventh Duchess of Bedford, Anna Russell. The Duchess got hungry at about 4pm each day, calling it “that sinking feeling”. As it was still four hours until dinner (at 8pm), she began to have sandwiches or a small cake with some tea. Her friends thought this was marvellous, and the idea spread quickly through (hungry) upper class circles.

Soon, it seems, everyone in England was looking forward to Afternoon Tea, and a great British tradition was born. Though, during the last century, the sandwiches and cake gave way to biscuits, still we reached for the teapot each afternoon. Not so much anymore, it seems. In the last five years, sales of tea and biscuits have dropped. Perhaps we are drinking coffee? The research was done by retail analysts Mintel.



Winter and Spring

Lord, end my winter, and let my spring begin. I cannot with all my longings raise my soul out of her death and dullness, but all things are possible with Thee. I need celestial influences, the clear shinings of Thy love, the beams of Thy grace, the light of thy countenance; these are the Pleiades to me. I suffer much from sin and temptation, these are my wintry signs, my terrible Orion. Lord, work wonders in me, and for me.

By Charles Haddon Spurgeon 1834 – 1892



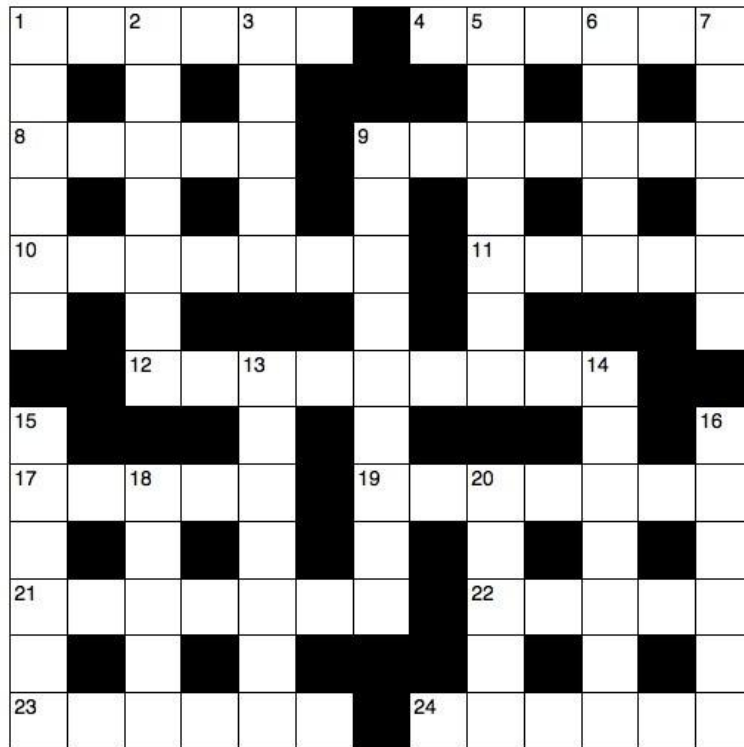
CROSSWORD CLUES

Across

- 1 Arouse (Song of Songs 2:7) (6)
- 4 Extinguish (Isaiah 1:31) (6)
- 8 "“They — — ,” you will say, “but I’m not hurt!”” (Proverbs 23:35) (3,2)
- 9 Unhappiness (Nehemiah 2:2) (7)
- 10 Jewish (7)
- 11 Dirge (anag.) (5)
- 12 ‘A truthful witness gives honest — , but a false witness tells lies’ (Proverbs 12:17) (9)
- 17 Paul quoted from the second one in his address in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:33) (5)
- 19 ‘Do not use your freedom to — the sinful nature’ (Galatians 5:13) (7)
- 21 ‘As you can see, he has done nothing to — death’ (Luke 23:15) (7)
- 22 Name applied by Isaiah to Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:1) (5)
- 23 ‘All the people — — one man, saying, “None of us will go home”’ (Judges 20:8) (4,2)
- 24 Lazarus, who was carried by angels to Abraham’s side when he died, was one (Luke 16:20) (6)

Down

- 1 Appalled (Job 26:11) (6)
- 2 ‘In an — to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea’ (Acts 27:30) (7)
- 3 Expel (Acts 18:16) (5)
- 5 ‘But I have a baptism to — , and how distressed I am until it is completed!’ (Luke 12:50) (7)
- 6 ‘Of the increase of his government and peace there will be — — ’ (Isaiah 9:7) (2,3)
- 7 Hurry (Psalm 119:60) (6)
- 9 ‘For I desire mercy, not — , and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings’ (Hosea 6:6) (9)
- 13 One of its towns was Sychar, where Jesus met a woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:5) (7)
- 14 Shouting (Acts 7:57) (7)
- 15 Arachnid (Isaiah 59:5) (6)
- 16 One of Paul’s first converts in Philippi was Lydia, a — in purple cloth (Acts 16:14) (6)
- 18 Donkeys (5)
- 20 Raked (anag.) (5)



Crossword solution:

10 ACROSS: 1, Awaken. 4, Quench. 8, Hit me. 9, Sadness. 10, Semitic. 11, Ridge. 12, Testimony. 17, Psalm. 19, Indulge. 21, Deserve. 22, Ariel. 23, Rose as. 24, Beggar.

Blessed are the poor in spirit
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Blessed are those who mourn
For they will be comforted

Blessed are the meek
For they will inherit the earth

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
For they will be filled

Blessed are the merciful
For they will be shown mercy

Blessed are the pure in heart
For they will see God

Blessed are the peacemakers
For they will be called sons of God

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven

