

On January 29th 1984, I arrived late for Bill Williamson's farewell at Caversham Presbyterian. He'd been with that congregation for nearly 20 years. I was late because we'd had an evening service here at 7:00pm at which there were 27 hardy souls – that's what we did in 1984 – church on Sunday at 10:30am and 7:00pm. I'd been the minister here for one day. In those days we called it an induction– somehow I think that word's more related to an experience some women go through.

Behind the pulpit around the road was a plaque commemorating the life of the Reverend Daniel Dutton who had been minister from 1888 until 1920 – 32 years.

On Christmas morning last year I looked at that plaque again and thought – not there yet, but if I'm a good boy I may reach that mark. So on January the 28th I sent a message to our family and reminded them that Bradley, aged 4, spent some of the time crawling round under the chairs on the old stage. I also said a heartfelt thank you to our God for the privilege of being with and part of this community for these decades. My varied experiences of church in 4 different locations over the holidays reminded me of why I felt this way.

Of course Caversham isn't the same community it was then although there are still 20 attending adults and 3 who were children then who pre-date us. I guess if you were making a Television programme about that group you'd call it Survivors.

When we began it felt like Caversham was an old church, the pews were borer ridden, the 1871 church was our hall, and kind of attached to the hall was a large wooden building with a ridiculously high ceiling. The new Surrey House was nearly completed. And where the carpark was out there, a house well past its use by date was about to be bulldozed.

32 years later with many changes already made, we're facing a new set of building issues. Great!

By way of introduction to today's Scripture texts I'd like to show you some buildings from the area around Cumberland and Crawford Streets. These slides show those renewed or refurbished and those that haven't been. Much of it feels like an alive, growing part of the city – that wasn't the case some years ago. What I'd like to do over these next four weeks is focus our thinking on the spiritual equivalent of the renewal that's taking place in that area of the city.

We sang '**renew in me a passion for you Lord**' and I'd like to introduce that subject before developing it over the next three weeks – what does a renewed Christian look like, what does a renewed church look like and how does a renewed community live in the world around it.

The shape and content may vary but that's the drift so to speak.

Renewal – there are several definitions of the word renewal

1. An instance of resuming something after an interruption as in 'the renewal of hostilities' – think several places in the Middle East
2. The action of extending the period of validity of a licence subscription, or contract – think driver's licence or Listener subscription
3. The replacement or repair of something – think the wet weather mat outside the front door
4. Among charismatic Christians renewal refers to the state or process of being made spiritually new in the Holy Spirit i.e. 'the call to continual spiritual renewal'

It's the fourth definition I'd like to take further – the idea of being made spiritually new in the Holy Spirit.

The words 'renew' and 'renewal' come up several times in the Scriptures and you can see here the connection with the focus of Nehemiah over the last few weeks – surely Nehemiah's mission was to initiate both physical and spiritual renewal in Jerusalem.

So at the risk of losing you in a myriad of Biblical references I'd like to list many of the places in the Bible where the words renew and renewal are used – I've got some copies of these texts here and they will be online on Tuesday all being well. I've decided to leave these in the order they come up in the Bible

RENEW, RENEWED, RENEWING (VERB)

Ruth 4:15

He will **renew** your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.'

1 Samuel 11:14

Then Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let us go to Gilgal and there **renew** the kingship.'

2 Kings 23:3

The king stood by the pillar and **renewed** the covenant in the presence of the LORD

Job 33:25

Let their flesh be **renewed** like a child's; let them be restored as in the days of their youth

Psalms 51:10

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and **renew** a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalms 103:5

Who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is **renewed** like the eagles?

Psalms 104:30

When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you **renew** the face of the ground.

Isaiah 40:31

But those who hope in the LORD will **renew** their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 41:1

'Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations **renew** their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment.

Isaiah 61:4

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will **renew** the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

Lamentations 5:21

Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; **renew** our days as of old

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

2 Corinthians 4:16

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being **renewed** day by day.

Philippians 4:10

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you **renewed** your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

RENEWAL (NOUN)

Job 14:14

If someone dies, will they live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my **renewal** to come.

Isaiah 57:10

You wearied yourself by such going about, but you would not say, 'It is hopeless.' You found **renewal** of your strength, and so you did not faint.

Matthew 19:28

Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the **renewal** of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Titus 3:5

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and **renewal by the Holy Spirit**....

These obviously refer to a range of experiences and settings and I don't intend to go through them all today – maybe as part of our exploring over this time you'd like to put them in their context and ask the Lord what he's saying to you There are others but where I felt there was repetition I only included one.

Some of these texts relate to spiritual renewal. I'd like to highlight 4 as a beginning. What I like about the song is that unless spiritual renewal results in a fresh passion for Jesus then it's not renewal as we're thinking of it.

I Ruth 4:15

He will **renew** your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.'

- The promise to Naomi when Obed was born
- A promise for all time – but especially for those who've been on the road for a while – and remember then old age was probably 50s and 60s
- He will renew your life – God's part of the deal, he will renew and sustain

II Psalm 51:10

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and **renew** a steadfast spirit within me.

- Renewal always includes personal recognition of the reasons why we need renewing
- A heart sensitive to the Lord, a heart open to the Lord
- In context a recognition that David had messed up badly – but there's always hope

III Isaiah 40:31

But those who hope in the LORD will **renew** their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

- I prefer wait on the Lord but
- Renewal of spiritual strength
- Energy to serve, energy to live, energy to risk

IV Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- Holistic approach – thinking differently, thinking in godly ways
- Removing the clutter
- A journey
- Must have to do with what we feed our minds

Just a starter – may the Lord indeed renew in us a passion for him