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Hello everyone! Let me introduce myself. My name is Neil Barker and amongst other things I'm part of the leadership team at Stanton Road Baptist Church, Luton. I'm married to Linda and we have two grown up and married children, David and Sarah. I'm probably what you'd describe as semi retired(I think!?) but spend a lot of my spare time as Chairman of Dunstable Town Football Club, who play in the semi professional non league system.

Have the majority of us ever lived through stranger times than these? I'm not sure if 'stranger' is the right word, perhaps 'unusual', or maybe 'challenging', or even 'perplexing' may better describe this period of pandemic.

Linda and I have recently had some renovations made to our downstairs lay out, which given the special circumstances we find ourselves in, has taken a little longer than planned. However, it has afforded me the opportunity to do some of the decorating that we were originally going to ask more seasoned professionals to carry out.

I make this sound like a blessing! ? To be honest once you've started there's no going back. This reminds me of the verses in **Philippians 3** which say, '**But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

At times life is tough and we have memories of happier times which we look back on fondly. However, we cannot stay in the past for long. It's not healthy or productive. We rob ourselves of the blessings that God wants to give today and the opportunities he has for us in the future. So we press on to win the prize. We have a great inheritance which has eternal dimensions. The resurrection of Jesus means that death is defeated, not just for Jesus, but for us too! It's a great inheritance not to be surpassed by anything we can enjoy in this life. The ultimate prize!

Another of the challenges of having renovations carried out is 'dust'. It gets everywhere, no amount of Pledge seems to shift it. This dust seems to laugh at you, as if to say, 'I'm here to stay, polish all you like, I'm going nowhere!' You polish a surface and the dust shouts, 'I'm back sucker'. Oh for the ultimate cleaning product!

Our lives are like this. The Bible calls this sort of dust 'sin'. Our rebellious nature takes refuge in both

conscious and unconscious acts of wrong doing. In the same way as Adam and Eve forsook their dependence on God for the 'thrill of independence', so do we. At times it seems we cannot stop ourselves despite our best efforts, our human polishing. The devil then shouts in our ear, 'you've blown it again, God won't forgive you this time'. Amazingly God does and continues to do so. His death pays the price we should pay, and His resurrection seals the deal.

John 3 v16 sums it up perfectly. **'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'** This is God's ultimate dust buster.

God bless you all.

Neil.

The price is paid,
Come let us enter in
To all that Jesus died
To make our own
For every sin
More than enough He gave
And bought our freedom
From each guilty stain

*The price is paid
Alleluia
Amazing grace
So strong and sure
And so with all my heart
My life in every part
I live to thank You for
The price You paid*

The price is paid
See Satan flee away
For Jesus crucified
Destroys his power
No more to pay
Let accusation cease
In Christ there is
No condemnation now

The price is paid
And by that scourging cruel
He took our sicknesses
As if His own
And by His wounds
His body broken there
His healing touch may now
By faith be known

The price is paid
'Worthy the Lamb' we cry
Eternity shall never
Cease His praise
The church of Christ
Shall rule upon the earth
In Jesus' name we have
Authority

