

COMING ENGAGEMENTS

At the time of going to press these are my engagements for the next four months. For up-to-date news of any additional meetings, log on to www.johnblanchard.org. Please pray for God's enabling at these events — and if possible plan to attend any that are being held near you.

- May**
- 3* BRIGHTON: Vardean College
 - 10* SUTTON, Surrey: The Midweek Church, Cheam Hall, 14 Cheam Road [Info: 07958 574959 or info@midweekchurch.co.uk]
 - 11* WARWICK: Warwick University
 - 14* BEXLEYHEATH, Kent: Marriott Hotel; organized by Free Grace Church, Belvedere, Kent as part of 200th anniversary celebrations. [Info: orcha@orcha.plus.com]
 - 20* COLCHESTER, Essex: Greenstead Evangelical Church [Info: d.ian.hughes@ntlworld.com]
 - 22-27 IRELAND: Christian Golfers' Conference, Dundrum, Co. Tipperary
- June**
- 3* KENDAL, Cumbria: 'Agnostics Night' at The Cock and Dolphin Hotel, Milnethorpe Road [Info: 015394 448468]
 - 4* KENDAL, Cumbria: St Thomas' Church, Stricklandgate [Info: 01539 448468]
 - 5 KENDAL, Cumbria: Parr Street Evangelical Church [Info: 01539 448468]
 - 10* CARDIFF: Cardiff University
 - 11 MINEHEAD, Somerset: Minehead and District Christian Convention, Millhouse Evangelical Church, Parkhouse Road – 4pm and 7pm [Info: 01643 7033887 or ernie@whortleberry.demon.co.uk]
 - 14* DONCASTER: Bessacarr Evangelical Church [Info: 01302 533570 or kna.mca@2a.org.uk]
 - 15* SOUTHWELL, Notts: Holy Trinity Church [Info: 01636 813988 or Julie@kidsoverflow.freeserve.co.uk]
 - 16 (am) SOUTHWELL, Notts: The Minster School
 - 16* DERBY: The Derby Suite, Assembly Rooms, Market Place [Info: cobthorne@btinternet.com]
 - 17* SHEFFIELD: Wycliffe Independent Church [Info: 0114 251 7673 or cunnah@lineone.net]
 - 18* INSKIP, Lancs: Inskip Baptist Church [Info: 01772 698782 or dandh@fsmail.net]
 - 19 (am) WIGAN, Lancs: Bryn Baptist Church [Info: 01942 719705 or paulhart@blueyonder.co.uk]
 - 19 (pm) ASHTON IN MAKERFIELD, Lancs: Cave Browne Evangelical Church [Info: 01942 723762]
- July**
- 16* FROME, Somerset: Holy Trinity Church [Info: 01373 465522 or mort@mortimore.fsnet.co.uk]

The remainder of July is reserved for study, preparation and writing.

August

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* Indicates a Popular Christian Apologetics meeting



NEWSLINE

Four-monthly notes from John Blanchard, with news of his ministry
No.7 May 2005

$$43 + 2 = 1!$$



Broadcasting in Pretoria

Mathematics was one of my stronger subjects at school (not that that is saying much!). The above headline may suggest that things have slipped rather badly since — but it is merely a device to pinpoint two anniversaries that have passed since the last issue of *Newsline*.

The first, in March, marked the end of my forty-third year in full-time Christian ministry. The years seem to have rushed by in a fraction of that time, though in the goodness of God

they have embraced travelling millions of miles, preaching to countless people on all five continents and seeing some twenty-five books published in over forty languages — and thanks to modern travel schedules I was able on the day concerned to preach twice in Zambia and once in South Africa.

The second anniversary was in April and marked two years since Christian Ministries came to an end and I began what used commonly to be called 'living by faith'. They have been twenty-four challenging and fulfilling months, with many heartening evidences of God's hand on the 'gear change' in the ministry both here in the UK and in overseas countries ranging from the United States to Romania and the Canary Islands to Poland. Joyce and I have also sensed God's hand on the move in his gracious and ample provision of all of our practical needs and we share the Psalmist's confidence that 'goodness and mercy' will continue to follow us as we seek to serve him.

The '1' in the heading is very straightforward. The nineteenth-century American minister Albert Barnes once wrote of men in the ministry, '(Their) great purpose ... is to make known in any and every way the Lord Jesus Christ... Whatever other men do, or do not do, their work is simple and plain, and it is not to cease or be intermitted till death shall close their toils. Neither by the love of ease, or wealth or pleasure, are they to turn aside from their work, or forsake the vocation to which God has called them.' More than ever I am determined to join these convictions with the apostle Paul's 'this one thing I do', and the prayerful support of *Newsline's* readers continues to be a significant encouragement to me as I seek to press on.

Battle for the mind

Universities continue to present a tremendous challenge to those trying to get the message of the gospel across to the country's young people. One recent invitation to help came from the Christian Union at University College, London, the third oldest university in England (after Oxford and Cambridge) and, back in 1826, the first to admit students who did not belong to the Church of England. Its original stance on Christianity was such that it was nicknamed 'The godless Institute on Gower Street'



University College, London

and I am told that it is still proud of its atheistic roots and of the fact that the Christian message 'rarely gets a look in'. The clothed skeleton of its spiritual father, Jeremy Bentham, sits bleakly at the end of its huge entrance hall and his core message of godless utilitarianism is impressively inscribed on a wall elsewhere in the main building.

UCL has 18,000 students from 130 countries and more professors than any other university in the country, with 600 established and personal chairs, so it presents a tremendous challenge to the Christian Union. Since speaking at the meeting it arranged for me, I have been told that one-third of those present were not Christians and that there has been some encouraging feedback, not least from a student who said it was 'the best talk she had heard for five years' and asked a CU friend whether she could join her at church. *Do pray for Christian work in our universities!*

JOIN THE TEAM!

If you have not seen *Newsline* before and would like to receive future copies (by post or e-mail) please let me know.

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Today's BIG question

The devastating earthquakes and tsunamis in the Indian Ocean last December led to countless people asking the age-old question 'Where is God when things go wrong?' and a letter in the *Daily Telegraph* put into words what many were thinking: 'On the abundant available evidence does it not seem that, if there is or was a God, it is now malevolent, mad or dead?'



This dreadful event and reactions to it in the secular media were the triggers for me to write a booklet that was published by Evangelical Press in March. This now replaces 'Where was God on September 11?' and tackles the question from an entirely different angle, while still ending on a strongly evangelistic note. The introduction now centres on the remarkable story of Joni Eareckson Tada, who became a paraplegic after a diving accident sustained while she was still a teenager.

Pre-publication interest was such that Evangelical Press arranged for a separate edition to be published in the United States, while the overall initial response has been hugely encouraging. Two overseas orders totalled 25,000 and one church in England ordered a special printing of 19,000, with the wording on the outside back cover changed to reflect the church's usual activities and a week of evangelistic outreach it was to hold.

There has also been considerable interest in foreign translations. Versions in French, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Chinese are already in hand and others are currently being considered.

Newsline readers interested in obtaining bulk supplies at special rates should contact Anthony Gosling at Evangelical Press: 01325 380 232 or anthony.gosling@evangelicalpress.org

Please pray that God will graciously use this particular publication to help sufferers to know even more of his grace 'in time of need' and to point sceptics to the reality of God's presence, power and love in even the most painful and puzzling of circumstances.

Thank you!

Warmest thanks to friends who in the course of the last four months have sent gifts through the CM Trust for the support of my ministry.

Your important fellowship in this way has been greatly appreciated.

Gifts sent directly to my home address are of course always acknowledged personally.

African Safari

South Africa has rarely been out of the headlines over the past few decades and its racial struggles have been aired internationally with varying degrees of accuracy. The momentous revolution ten years ago has resulted in dramatic changes, though there is still much to be done as the nation battles its ‘seven giants’ — HIV/AIDS, crime, poverty and unemployment, families in crisis, violence, sexism and racism. Yet it remains a wonderful country, breathtakingly beautiful, rich in natural resources and ‘salted’ with many Christians of every ethnic background who are seeking to be faithful to God’s saving and sanctifying grace. My recent and fifth visit there may have been my best ever, with not a ‘flat spot’ anywhere and with great encouragement in all three major provinces I visited.

My opening day was in **Gauteng**, but began in Zambia, as I had spoken at two Saturday morning sessions there before flying to Johannesburg for an evening engagement in Roodepoort. The welcome at Christ Church got the tour off to an excellent start — though it had been a long day! Sunday offered no lie-in as there were two morning services at Northcliff Union Church in Johannesburg, each with 400 in attendance, and these were followed by a great evening in Rosebank Union Church, Sandton, when 500 came for an exposition of the Bible’s teaching on death and the afterlife.

Over the next three days I spoke at the University of Witwatersrand, the University of Johannesburg and Pretoria University, and it was good to interact with students whose lives may significantly influence many others over the coming years, while an extended interview on Radio Pulpit, whose wide range of listeners is now boosted by internet streaming, gave another good opening. Among the evening engagements, an overflow meeting at Christchurch, Blairgowrie, stands out, not least because a man recently confessing his faith by baptism told me he had been a ‘convinced agnostic’ until he read *‘Does God Believe in Atheists?’* two years ago. In introducing me at a service in Brackenhurst, Alberton on the following night the pastor told of a number of people who had been converted through reading *‘Ultimate Questions’*.

From Gauteng I flew to **KwaZulu-Natal** and went straight from the airport to Glenwood High School, Durban, to speak at a specially called meeting of biology teachers and senior students. The South African government has decreed that in two years’ time evolution *must* be taught at senior school level and the meeting had been called so that I could expose the flaws in neo-Darwinianism and confirm the solid basis of biblical creationism. Later in the day I spoke at a large rally at Durban North Baptist Church.

Saturday began with a breakfast superbly organized by Grace Evangelical Church, when the room was packed with 80 people, many of them refugees from war-torn and famine-affected countries elsewhere in Africa, while at night 100 came to an evangelistic dinner excellently arranged at a local hotel by Christ Church, Pinetown.

My last day in KwaZulu-Natal was full and fruitful. It began with my preaching in Christ Church to congregations of 400 at 8.00am and 1,000 at 9.30am. Christ Church is a dynamic fellowship that has already planted twelve other churches in the last eighteen years and it



Full house in KwaZulu-Natal

was a great privilege to serve under the leadership of Ben Dykman and Vernon Loker. Later in the day I travelled inland to Pietermaritzburg where 500 came to a memorable evening service led by Bishop Warwick Cole-Edwards and in which Christians from Rwanda and Mozambique also took part. I last preached in the town seventeen years ago and it was great to see such a thriving witness there.

From Durban a two-hour flight took me to the **Western Cape** and to a busy schedule in and around Cape Town arranged by Christian Book Discounters which, under Peter Temple’s leadership, does such a magnificent job in making good Christian literature available in South Africa at affordable prices. Directly after landing I went to the studios of Cape Talk Radio for a 45-minute interview on the area’s biggest news and talk programme, while later in the day there was nearly a ‘full house’ at Newlands Evangelical Church.

The Bible Institute of South Africa, beautifully located in Kalk Bay, has been doing a superb job for over eighty years. Recent additions to its schedule includes a programme in which seventy men travel up to 280 kilometres every Tuesday evening to receive 2½ hours of biblically-based training. On this visit I squeezed together three one-hour presentations to a group of pastors and church leaders and it was a great privilege to serve them in this way. Later in the week I also went to George Whitefield College and thoroughly enjoyed a lively session there with some seventy students and faculty members.

There were many other engagements during the week, several marked by hearing from people converted through reading one or another of my evangelistic books, but in some ways the most significant event was in the rural town of Villiersdorp, where a large crowd from at least eight other towns in the area joined us for two one-hour teaching sessions on Saturday morning. These were enthusiastically received and the event seemed to me to point up a pattern that could well be copied elsewhere — perhaps even here in the UK.

After the first Sunday service on my last day in the country, a woman came to tell me, ‘My life has been turned around this morning.’ This was a lovely seal on the whole tour and I left South Africa with very mixed feelings; delighted of course to be returning home, but sorry to leave a truly great country with such massive spiritual potential. God bless South Africa!

ZAMBIA the good, the bad and the ugly

My recent first visit to Zambia was a challenging eye-opener. Sometimes cruelly called ‘the armpit of Africa’ I found that it had all three features in the heading to this article.

The good is outstandingly good. This year marks the 150th anniversary of David Livingstone’s discovery of the Victoria Falls, and his impressions of Zambia were such that he wrote, ‘Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.’ The Zambians’ delightful openness to serious conversation, including gospel issues, is another hugely positive thing to be said in the country’s favour.

The bad is very bad. Twenty years of rampant socialism led to terrible deprivation, dragging the nation down to become the poorest country in sub-Saharan Africa, now with 85% unemployment and average earnings equivalent to 50p a day.

The ugly is represented in the AIDS pandemic, with some 65% of the population being HIV positive. The life expectancy is just 36 and at one point a pastor challenged me to find three white-haired people in a congregation of 400. I was also told that in one church of 100 as many as 70% were infected through sexual promiscuity before conversion.

Yet in this baleful setting the gospel is proving its power and it was my privilege to serve Faith Baptist Church, Kitwe, and Kabwata Baptist Church in the capital city of Lusaka. In Kitwe the American pastor Phil Hunt and a dedicated team are doing valiant work — preaching, teaching, running a school and an orphanage, and reaching out to hundreds of students at Copperbelt University. On the day I arrived from England I spoke on the campus of the Zambia Institute of Business and so many students and others came that about fifty had to stand outside to hear as best they could. Many were counselled afterwards and I have since heard of at least two professions of conversion.

The multi-faceted ministry of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka is led by Conrad Mbewe, whose zeal for the gospel is a byword in many parts of the country. The highlight of my time in Lusaka was to take two one-hour Saturday morning sessions in a church bulging at the seams with over 300 young adults, and their hunger for biblical teaching was hugely heartening. As the result of this visit I am trying to pull together a project to have ‘*Ultimate Questions*’ published in Bemba and Nyanja, two of the country’s indigenous languages that would cover over 50% of the population. My goal is to have these in use by the autumn and I would value prayer that God would graciously enable this to happen.

I left Zambia greatly affected by its problems, but also by its possibilities, and hoping that I might have further and greater opportunities to serve it in the days to come.



Young adults in Kitwe, Zambia

The *media* and the *message*

I have recently had an unusual number of broadcasting opportunities to share biblical perspectives with very large numbers of people. These began with yet another opening on Radio KCLR in the Republic of Ireland, this time to speak on my booklet ‘*Where is God when things go wrong?*’. Next came an unexpected invitation to appear on *The Jeremy Vine Show* on BBC’s Radio 2. The trigger was the widespread controversy over BBC Television’s decision to screen *Jerry Springer – the Opera* and I was invited to discuss the issues concerned with the *Evening Standard*’s television critic.



Broadcasting House, London

Within an hour of returning from South Africa the same programme invited me to get to a studio as soon as possible to discuss the place of Christianity in politics, as the Prime Minister was to address a ‘Faith Works’ meeting later that day — but the producer had mercy on me when he found that I had just finished travelling for 22 hours!

Then came an invitation from the BBC to be interviewed by twelve local radio stations in a series of programmes running for two hours from 7.00am on Easter Sunday morning, the subject this time being ‘Where is God when things go wrong?’ This was a quite remarkable opportunity and though one station failed to come on line, I was able to talk in turn to presenters from BBC local radio stations in Oxford, Cornwall, Coventry and Warwickshire, Greater Manchester, Jersey, York, Berkshire, Bristol, Northampton, Guernsey (the presenter initially got my name wrong!) and Leeds.

I am thankful for these unexpected openings and trust that they will have proved effective in the lives of many listeners.