

The Psalms Of Ascent - The Conclusion

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[0 : 00] Good evening, welcome to our worship tonight. It's good for us to gather to worship God and we look forward to his blessing as we do so we're going to begin our worship tonight singing in Psalm 121.

! We'll sing the whole of the psalm to God's praise. I to the hills will lift mine eyes. From whence doth come my need? My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will he slumber that he keeps.

Behold, he that keeps Israel, he slumbers not, nor sleeps. We're going to sing the whole psalm to God's praise. I to the hills will lift mine eyes.

I to the hills will lift my eyes. From whence doth come my name.

My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made.

[1 : 15] I am the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. I am the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made.

I am the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. I am the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. O Jesus, Jesus, I know His love, Jesus, I know His love, Yes, I know His love, Yes, I know His love, Yes, I know His love, Yes, I know His love, I can't just say, that would my life be done by my life, nor yet the sun I may.

The Lord shall be thy soul, he shall present thee from all earth.

And for thy holy name, O peace of heaven.

Let's pray to God. Heavenly Father, we give you this evening praise and thanks that we can tonight come to the one who's eternal and unchangeable in his being, in his wisdom, in his power, in his holiness, in his goodness, in his truth.

[3 : 34] Thank you. I want to tell you that there is a stability to your character, one which defies our expectation and our experience of so much of life in this world.

When we are surrounded by change and so often we observe the decay and the distress that it brings.

And yet, this evening, we have an opportunity to come to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the great I Am of the Old Testament.

The one who is the same yesterday, today and forever. And we thank you that we can pause tonight and reflect on your great love towards us.

We can give you thanks for the love that sent Jesus into this world. That the second person of the Trinity took on flesh.

[4 : 44] That he emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant. And being found in human likeness and having lived a life of profound and in often places complex suffering and experience in this world.

Yet went to the cross and died in our place willingly. Without removing any of the horror or the pain or the reality of it.

We may thank you that he tasted death for us. So that we may taste and experience the fullness of life and the goodness of God's grace.

And so we would come to you tonight Lord and confess our sin before you. As we reflect on the cross and as we consider the work of Jesus.

We acknowledge before you that it is our sin and our iniquity that necessitated that. And so we thank you tonight that we have a saviour whom we can cling to.

[5 : 53] And we pray that as we consider your great love and character. That it would be found in the person of Christ. That we rest and find our security entirely this evening.

We want to pray tonight for your blessing on this church. And we thank you Father for the witness of this congregation. We ask and pray Father that you would bless and prosper them as a fellowship.

May their bonds of love and compassion for one another deepen. And may it be that as people look upon this congregation. That they would see evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit here.

That they would confess that these must be disciples of Jesus. When they see how they love one another. We pray Father for that overflow of love that would spread forth from the love for the church.

And for your people. And for your cause into the community at large. That there would be a love expressed towards the lost and the needy. The desperate and the impoverished in this community.

[7 : 02] That the mercy of God might reach out from this church. Not merely this building but from this fellowship. This gathering of your people. Who are called to bear the image of Jesus.

And that from bearing that image. An overflow of love would extend towards those around about. And we ask and pray that in that wonderful revelation of your love.

Not only in the preaching of the word. But in the action of lives transformed by the grace of God. And that we would see many coming to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior as well.

And so we pray tonight Father that you would indeed revive us. Not just revive your church. It's easy for us Lord to make that impersonal.

We need to be revived ourselves. And so tonight would you bring fresh life into our experience. Into the experience of your people.

[8 : 05] One by one. Help us Lord more and more to part from sin. And to live for righteousness. Show us how to live lives that are shaped by.

And are all about the profoundness of your grace. Extending towards sinners. And may that good news of the gospel be what we live for.

May it be why we get up in the morning. May it be why we go about our lives day by day. Not merely for the pursuit of security. In pursuing wages that are necessary we know.

But may our reason for living be all about the gospel. And the good news that is in Christ Jesus. We pray Father for the community in which you have placed this congregation.

We pray for all of our communities across these islands. And we ask for your blessing upon them. We thank Lord of the great travail that there always is. There's always uncertainty about people's jobs and livelihoods.

[9 : 07] All of these things Lord that are so important in the experience of men and women and boys and girls day to day. We ask and pray Father that you would remember us in your mercy in these days.

And that you would be gracious to us. We pray Father for those who are going through times of great uncertainty just now because of ill health. Both in the congregation and in the community around us.

We pray that you would help them. That you would bring healing if that's possible. We pray for our health service. For our doctors. For the hospital. And we ask and pray Father for those who are anxious about loved ones perhaps who have even in recent days gone through difficult experiences.

And we ask and pray Father that in all of this we would learn that you are a God who is worthy of our trust. And a God also who does great things beyond what we can ask or even think.

We want to pray Father for our nation. We lift up our land before you today. We pray for our leaders. We pray for the awakening of many to the gospel in these days. Lord we pray for our land as it turns away from your ways and pursues its own course.

[10 : 14] And it says that the things that we would rather have are not God's ways. But the ways that seem to us to be the most appealing. And we cry to you Father that you would remember us.

That you would be gracious to us. That you would hear our confession. Because our nation Lord and the elected representatives that we elect.

The rulers that we put over us. And often Lord the politicians that we place our trust in. They are the ones so often who act in these ways.

But we are the ones who put them there. And so Father forgive us. For all of the ways in which we have not conveyed your truth.

For all of the ways in which we have not pursued righteousness. As a standard to look for in our politicians. We pray that you would grant help and strength.

[11 : 14] To those who would stand up for your truth. In our country's parliaments. We ask and pray that you would give wisdom to them. And that you would help them Lord. Not only to know the right things to do and to say.

But that you would help them to know the living God themselves. That above all Lord. Not only would they be men and women who speak something of your truth.

But men and women who know in their hearts the living God. And so we pray Father that you would open the hearts of many in these days. Even in our parliament and in our governments.

We ask that you would reveal yourself to them. As a God of great mercy. And that you would show yourself in the person of Jesus to them. We pray Lord for the nations of the world tonight.

We think again of the great uncertainty that surrounds the conflict in Israel. We want to pray Father that you would hasten the end of the schemes of wicked men.

[12 : 17] And we think Father of the threat that that nation lives under constantly. And yet we know that at the same time. That threat cannot justify inhumane treatment.

And so we pray Father that you would bring peace. Not merely that you would bring Lord again an end to hostility. But that you would bring full shalom.

The peace of God into these nations. And so we cry to you Lord for the work of the gospel. Think of the work of the gospel tonight in Israel. We pray Father for organizations that we know there.

That we have connections to through various organizations. And we want to pray Father tonight for the work of the gospel in Iran as well. We pray Father for the awakening of many in that nation.

Lord they are desperate as a nation I think to throw off the shackles of a rigid Islamic regime. And yet Lord we fear what may come in its place.

[13 : 16] And we cry to you Lord that in your great grace you would remember that nation. And that you would lift up many servants who will be bold to speak the truth.

Because boldness it will take Lord. It's a dark and difficult place to witness for Jesus. And so we do pray Lord that you would encourage the church in that land as well. Do not allow Lord the mere hostility between nations to drive people apart.

But we'd Father you in your great mercy bring true reconciliation. The reconciliation that Paul speaks of in his letters. Of Christ breaking down the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile.

To bring about the glory of God. And that's what our prayer is Lord for that part of the world. That that bright radiant light of the gospel.

And we be what brings about the peace and the shalom of the nations. In that part as well. So Father be gracious we pray. In the world in which we live remember your people.

[14 : 20] Throughout the world tonight. In all of the trouble that afflicts the righteous. May you be the light of the world. May we see clearly the light of Jesus in all of this. And we pray this in his name.

Amen. Amen. Friends let's worship again. Singing to God's praise in Psalm 147. Psalm 147.

We're going to sing at the beginning of the psalm. We're going to sing five stanzas through to verse 7. Praise ye the Lord for it is good praise to our God to sing.

For it is pleasant and to praise. It is a comely thing. God doth build up Jerusalem. For he it is alone that the dispersed of Israel doth gather into one.

That's a great idea there. Not merely of the peace of Jerusalem as a city. Through to the present day that we should long for. But just why or where that peace comes from.

[15 : 18] It is the gathering of God of his people together. And that's where as I was praying just now. That the true peace of that region will come from. And that's where our hope lies as well.

For the future. That God would shine his light into the nations. So let's sing to God's praise. From the beginning of the psalm. Through to verse 7.

Praise ye the Lord. For it is good to praise to our God to sing. Praise ye the Lord.

For it is good. Praise to our God to sing.

For it is pleasant and to praise. Yes, God to sing.

[16 : 15] Yes, God.

Yes, God. Yes, God. Yes, God. to one. Oh, suck the broken his dead heart and be lived in their eyes.

He left under faithful ones. He then every divine.

He does the number of the stars. He gives them every one.

It is the Lord on your faith but his wisdom search and none.

[17 : 58] The Lord lived the meek and the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the Lord and give him thanks on harvest praise the son me.

Would you please turn with me in your Bibles this evening to the book of Psalms.

they're going to read in the songs of a saint. So we're going to begin in Psalm 120. We'll read a couple of Psalms there and then towards the end of it as well.

Forward to 134. So Psalm 120 to begin with. a song of a saint.

[19 : 19] In my distress I called to the Lord and he answered me. Deliver me O Lord from lying lips from a deceitful tongue.

What shall be given to you and what shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? A warrior's sharp arrows with glowing coals of the broom tree.

Woe to me that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar. too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace.

I am for peace but when I speak they are for war. The second song of a saint. I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber.

[20 : 23] Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

Then on into 122 the song of the saints. On the dawn I was glad when they said to me let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet have been standing within your gates O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem built as a city that is bound firmly together to which the tribes go up. The tribes of the Lord as was decreed for Israel. I give thanks to the name of the Lord for thrones there sorry thrones for judgment were set thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they be secure who love you. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers. For my brothers and companions sake I will say peace be within you.

[21 : 38] For the sake of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your good. And then if you can go over a couple of pages to the last of the songs of the saints Psalm 134 Very short little psalm.

A song of the saints Come bless the Lord all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord.

May the Lord bless you from Zion he who made heaven and earth. Amen. This is God's word to us.

And we're going to sing again before we turn back to this passage we're going to sing in Psalm 119 verse 33. Psalm 119 verse 33 Teach me O Lord the perfect way of thy precept divine and to observe it to the end I shall my heart incline give understanding unto me so keep thy law shall I yea even with my whole heart I shall observe it carefully.

And we'll sing that section of the psalm through to verse 40 to God's praise. Teach me O Lord the perfect way of thy precepts divine. Teach me O Lord the perfect way of thy precepts divine and to not send it to the end I shall I shall My heart is mine.

[23 : 35] Give a nurse and lay out to me. So keep thy Lord's cry.

Give with thy whole heart thy shout. Offer with care for thee.

And thy loss has made me to go. For I give thy name.

My heart is through thy death's morties. And not to be this time.

Turn thou away thy sight and eyes. From you ain't by me.

[24 : 54] As in thy good and holy way. He's which could break and be.

Come fair to thee thy gracious word.

Which I give to every year. In to thy servant Lord who is devoted to thy fear.

Turn thou away thy fear reproach. For to thy trust be.

Though for thy presence I have wrong. In thy truth quicken me.

[26 : 16] Would you please turn in your Bibles back to the passage that we've read in Psalm 134.

The Son of the Saints. Come bless the Lord. All you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord.

May the Lord bless you from Zion. He who made heaven and earth. Here's how we bow in prayer before we study the word together. Heavenly Father. As we come for a little time this evening to reflect on this psalm.

We thank you Father for the great desire that you have to bless your people. This is a psalm that is full of that orientation.

That desire of God to bless the people that he has made. And we know that the correct way for us to come into that is seeking to bless you.

[27 : 33] Seeking to glorify you. Seeking to exalt you. Make much of you. God blesses the humble. And we pray that that would be our experience this evening.

That we would come with that humility of spirit. That puts ourselves in subjection to your word. And so help us to see the goal of our pilgrimage.

In all that we do. In following Jesus. In the days of our lives as well. And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen. So I don't know if you've ever stopped to look at the songs of ascent in the book of Psalms.

You know sometimes we can very often go through these psalms one at a time. I think very often when you're, even as a preacher, when you're going through them you tend to look at the psalms sometimes in each one in isolation.

And there's certainly a place for that. They're all written with their own context and so on. The psalms in a sense are quite interesting in that there's a trajectory within them. The psalms, they start in a certain place and they go to a certain place.

[28 : 47] And it's really interesting as you look at the songs of the saints. We've read already tonight Psalm 120, the first of them. It starts in a place of war. With a longing for there to be a place of peace.

A place of shalom. And the songs of ascent end in the arrival at Jerusalem and the peace of God, the blessing of God that surpasses understanding.

It's just too deep for us to grasp really. It's pronounced on the pilgrims who have arrived there. So you've got the first of these songs. I love peace but the people around me are all wanting war.

And the end of the songs takes you to this point where there is no sign of war at all. Conflict is forgotten and peace has descended.

I think it's important for us to remember that as we look at a world that is consumed more and more with violence. There's so much uncertainty around about us in world affairs.

[29 : 52] And perhaps in times where we are a bit anxious about what the future might hold. And around about us there are plenty people who clamor for war.

Yet God desires to bring us and all of creation in fact to a place of peace and shalom. In this song we have the conclusion of the songs of the saints.

So the songs of the saints, just to paint the picture for you, the Israelites on religious festivals, Day of Atonement for example, would be heading from their own communities, farms, towns, villages, other cities scattered around Judah and Israel.

And they would come to Jerusalem, to the temple, as the focus of their worship. And as they're gathering, they're literally heading up the hills.

They're ascending towards Jerusalem, into the hilly mountainous region in the centre of the land where the city of Jerusalem is located. And so you've got that physical ascent, as they're going up on this journey, but also to that, I suppose you could say almost a religious ascent, to the high days of the Jewish religious calendar.

[31 : 21] And so they're ascending towards these places of religious observance. In Psalm 134, as it sits at the conclusion of it, you can picture the scene that these pilgrims arrive at Jerusalem, and arrive, in fact, more than just at Jerusalem, more than just in the gates of the city, they arrive at the temple.

So the temple's the real destination. And when they arrive at the temple, they address the priests who are serving there. And so they say to the priests, And then it's almost as if it's a call and response.

Because the last verse, I would take as being the priests responding to the people's arrival, the blessing of God. In fact, it's almost like a benediction that's pronounced on the people at the end of their pilgrimage, at their arrival at the temple.

May the Lord bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth. And so tonight, I just want to work through the psalm. I don't even have specific points.

I just want to break down the psalm line by line. And we'll go through it, and we'll mine out what's there in front of us. The first verse of the psalm, it's an appeal to the servants of the Lord who minister in the sanctuary to bless the Lord.

[32 : 47] This travelling group of pilgrims, then they've arrived, and they want the priests to engage in their priestly activity on their behalf.

And that's really what happens in the temple. The function of the temple is not merely for the priests to just autonomously go about duties and responsibilities on behalf of the people in isolation.

There is a sort of transaction that takes place. The people who arrive will bring with them offerings and sacrifices that the priests will then go and offer and sacrifice.

The people will come with specific petitions that they want the priests to engage with God on their behalf over. They will have requests for intercession, and the priests will engage in all of these things.

Besides that, there's an even, in a sense, almost a slightly kind of subtler sense to this as well, is that this experience is coming to a very visible focal point.

[33 : 55] The temple, if it's a nighttime arrival, the temple itself would have been lit up. One of the priestly functions was to light the lamps in the temple.

That's necessary because during the day, in fact, there's no windows inside the temple, so it's necessary to light it. But even on the religious festivals of the Jews, there would be lights lit around the temple itself.

So the temple becomes this bright spot up on the high up on the hill in Jerusalem. Even during the daytime, in fact, it would be a very radiant spot because the temple, Solomon's temple certainly, had been built overlaid with gold.

So when the sun was shining, it would be this kind of radiant focal point for everyone around about to see and to have that attention kind of drawn to. It was prominent.

And so out of this, the reason for all of that is to remind the people that the destination of their pilgrimage is not merely the temple, but the presence of God within it.

[35 : 00] Remember, God himself dwelled within the temple. When Solomon consecrated the temple, the presence of God that had been previously in the tabernacle descended upon the temple and the radiance of God dwelled over the mercy seat, dwelling as a throne between the cherubim that were there over the Ark of the Covenant.

Once a year on the Holy of Holies, on the Day of Atonement, sorry, the High Priest is allowed then into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood over the mercy seat in the literal presence of God with the majesty and the radiance of God himself there.

So the temple reflects that sense of radiance. And as they rise towards the temple, as they go up through the streets of Jerusalem, that sense of expectation of meeting with the Lord, of worshipping the Lord in his immediate presence almost, getting as close as they can to the presence of God is foremost in these pilgrims' minds.

And so they can't go in. They're not Levites. They're not priests. So they can't go into the holy place and make their offerings. They can't even go to the altar to make their offerings themselves.

They need an intercessor. But they're looking forward to this point where they will meet with God as close as they can come. And they're asking the priests to engage in that activity for them.

[36 : 33] I suppose there's a whole string of applications that we can make there from this. Perhaps the most obvious, and this is simply in terms of the gospel, is that today we still need an intermediary.

We still need someone to intercede for us with God. We don't need today priests in the sense that I'm not a priest.

And in perhaps other parts of the Christian tradition within Roman Catholicism, for example, there would be people who function as priests and see their role as being an intermediary between the people and God.

That's not the priestly function that belongs in the New Testament. The New Testament no longer has priests. Because we have today one great final high priest.

We have Jesus. And every one of us can come to him. Every one of us has direct access to him. To entreat him to engage with the Father on our behalf.

[37 : 47] And what that really means is for his blood to be our covering. Just as the high priest went in on the day of atonement to make an offering for the sins of the people and to atone for the sins of the people.

He would do that by sprinkling his blood before the mercy seat. And that's what Jesus has done. And tonight, if you want salvation, if you want rescued from your sins, then you need Jesus.

You need Jesus to bless you. You need Jesus to pronounce the blessing of God upon you. You need Jesus to represent you before God to secure that blessing.

What you need is the sacrifice of Jesus at Golgotha to be your covering. And so as we sing these words, let's sing them with that understanding that this is a psalm that is full of the need for Jesus and full of the work of Jesus in what he has done for his people as our high priest.

We need the blood of Jesus shed for sinners to be our covering. And so tonight, if you're looking for salvation, if you're wondering about how you can secure this, I would urge you to reflect on these ideas, these thoughts.

[39 : 16] That Jesus has taken your sin upon himself. That if you come to him in faith, if you come to him trusting him, you can ask him to carry away your guilt.

to lay it before him. And for you to receive the blessing of God because of what he has done. Moving on though, there's another side to this as well.

And that is that although today I've said there are no priests in one sense in the New Testament, because the work of Jesus is finished, there is still some priestly work to be done.

That's because in the New Testament, all believers have a priestly function and that is a function of intercession. We can pray for others.

We can come and we can appeal to God for the blessing of God upon our families, our neighbours, our community, our churches.

[40 : 19] We can appeal to God for his blessing to bring peace into the dark places of the world. We can appeal to God to remember his persecuted church.

We can appeal to God to be merciful towards the poor and the needy. We can appeal to God for healing for those who are sick. There's so many things, in fact, that are all New Testament functions and which are themselves inherently pastoral.

We're dealing with people. We're interacting with people. And so like a good shepherd, we take care of perhaps the little corners of the flock of God that are placed around us.

We take care of the responsibilities that God has given us, the burdens that he has put on our own hearts. We have opportunities to serve and all of these are priestly roles.

So we never take away from the work of Jesus. We never add to the work of Jesus. The high priestly work of Jesus, dealing with sin, that's finished. But in the New Testament, there is this other priestly work that goes on around about that.

[41 : 36] an intercessory work, a work of witness and testimony, and so on, all of that, which is important. And it's important to remember within that that we're called to serve.

This is the function that we're called to. Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord. So tonight, that appeal extends to us. As we sing these words, in the end, we're worshipping God.

And this is an interesting thing. We're worshipping God by remembering that we are servants. That tonight is part of your worship as a Christian. You are a servant of the Most High God.

And so within that, there's another little aspect of teaching that we need to remember. What our role is. The servant does not turn around to his master and say, no, I'm not doing that.

The servant doesn't get to turn around to his master and say, this is what I think the way should be done. This is how I think my service should be carried out. We don't get to set our own objectives, our own priorities.

[42 : 51] We get to listen and obey. And tonight, I want to encourage you, if you're a Christian, wondering about this.

I mean, what do I do as a Christian? And sometimes we get all tied up in knots kind of thinking about that. But actually, the answer is pretty simple. Study your Bible, listen to your master's voice, and put into practice what you discover there.

It really is that simple. The path of discipleship is one of listening to your master's voice and obeying his call.

In that sense, I suppose we're a bit like sheepdogs. We hear what the master's voice is. We hear the instructions. They're not difficult to understand. It's only our sin and our hardness of heart that often leads us to a place where we would say, no, I'm not listening to that.

I'm not doing that. And dig our heels in. But actually, the command itself is not obscure. It's a call to righteousness. It's a call to uprightness. It's a call to mortifying sin.

[44 : 04] It's a call to bearing witness to the power of the cross. It's a call to keep in step with the Holy Spirit. It's a call to walk with God all the days of our lives.

And what we struggle with is our own hearts, not with the command itself. And so servants and servants, we need to learn to yield our hearts to the command of our God.

Not only that, but also we have to think further about where this happens. The context of our service at times is uncomfortable. The context of these priest servants was uncomfortable at times.

Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord. Nighttime service in the ancient world was not comfortable because they didn't have electricity, they didn't have central heating, they didn't have streetlights, they didn't have comfort, and all of the things that we today take for granted in the nighttime.

The night was a difficult place to minister. There's potentially danger creeping around. There's sometimes uncertainty about what's happening.

[45 : 36] And those who minister by night are sometimes put into that place where their anxiety and where their fear has to be overcome. And that's the same today is true for Christians.

God calls us to minister in dark places. It might be dark places in our own experience, for example. You might be someone who struggles with depression.

Someone who struggles with a downward turn in your mind when circumstances seem to be overwhelming and too much for you. It might be darkness in the experience that you're going through at a particular moment.

It could be the darkness of illness where the walls seem to close in, don't they? When you don't really see much beyond the room you're in. Perhaps even spiritually in these times your prayer life seems to falter, doesn't it?

You're crying out to God in pain and you feel as if He's not even hearing you. And you have to minister in that context. You have to serve God in that place of darkness and difficult experience.

[46 : 51] Sometimes it can be the darkness of the things that we're called to walk through. It can be the darkness of the sin of this world. It can be the darkness of the affliction that comes into life in this world.

It can be the darkness of perhaps ministering in situations of abuse, caring for people who have been abused. It can be the darkness of dealing with addiction, helping people, maybe family members who are going through seasons of addiction to alcohol or drugs.

And in all of that you can feel at times like despairing, can't you? All of these times you can feel like what God is asking you to do is just a bit too much. You feel like your strength is sapped, your energy to go on is non-existent, but you hear the words of this psalm, come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord.

The call to you in these dark hours is just the same. Minister, bless the Lord, glorify His name with your service, exalt Him and make much of Him in all of these dark chapters.

I suppose the most important thing in all of this is the one whom we are glorifying, the one whom we are exalting. In all of these difficult places and in all of this difficult service, the one that we are called to glorify, the one we are called to worship, the one we are called to make much of is this Yahweh.

[48 : 26] Come bless Yahweh, the Lord. It's that name that God had gave Moses back in Exodus chapter 2 when Moses is responding to his call from the Lord.

Moses, remember, he asks God and he says, when I go back to the children of Israel in Egypt and they say to me, tell me what God sent you, what will I say?

And God responds to Moses and says, tell them, I am has sent you, the God of Abraham and Jacob and Isaac. And that word, the name I am is the same letters as we found throughout the Old Testament in the name of the Lord, both capitals that we have, the name Yahweh, Y-H-W-H in Hebrew letters.

And what it is is a name of faithfulness, a covenant name, that our service is of a covenant keeping God.

And the blessing of God is the blessing of a covenant keeping God. God. So in this psalm as the priests in the temple are appealed to, bless the Lord for us, lift up your hands towards the holy place and bless the Lord.

[49 : 52] And then as they respond, may the Lord bless you from Zion. The person that has been glorified and exalted is this covenant keeping, faithful, everlasting, loving God.

The God who, as the Catechism teaches us, is the same yesterday, today and forever, is unchanging in his wisdom, knowledge, power, goodness, holiness and truth. He is faithful to his people.

And this psalm, it reminds us that the God we serve, the God that we bless, the God that we worship, the God who calls us to minister in dark places, the God that calls us to be a blessing to the people around us, he is to us a faithful God.

He's not going to pause, he's not going to stop, he's not going to stint in his commitment to his people, he's going to be faithful and true to the end. Back to the gate of heaven.

He's faithful to his people. And the reason for his faithfulness is because he blesses us in Christ. Because God's, the Father's love for his people is rooted not in his people's worthiness in and of themselves, it's rooted in his own good pleasure and sending his son into the world and his son's obedience and dying in our place.

[51 : 19] And that's the faithfulness of God, that's what anchors it. That God cannot betray his own commitment, not to us primarily and firstly, but firstly his commitment to his son.

you will have a people who will, whose names you will bear in the hands that will be nailed to the cross but you will bear their names and they will be yours and I will give them to you and none of them will be lost.

And that's the Father's commitment to Jesus about us. And he seals that commitment by giving us a down payment.

He sends the Holy Spirit into the experience of his people. So when the priests are asked in verse 2 to lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord, it's to bless the Lord because of all that has been accomplished in the holy place.

The holy place is of course a model of heaven where the transactional work of Jesus takes place where the son is lifted up to the father at the cross and the father receives the offering of the son and it covers our sin completely because of what happens at Golgotha and then the Holy Spirit is given from that place under the authority of the son who now sits there on the throne of God and who sends his Holy Spirit out to secure God's people and whose spirit now dwells within us.

[52 : 43] It's all because of that work of the Trinity. And you're invited tonight to recognize the blessing of God in these things.

Verse 2 there's that wonderful phrase isn't there lift up your hands to the holy place it's a mode of prayer in the Old Testament. It's a way for the Israelites to approach and address the Almighty and there's a couple of things that are probably going on there.

One of them is an appeal to a blameless state. I would lift up my hands like this to show if I was in America sorry and I was stopped by the police in a difficult situation.

You would hold up your hands because you want your hands to be held up and clear to show you're not carrying a gun. Your hands are blameless. Your hands are innocent. You don't want to be shot.

There's that element to this as well that's going on there. But there's also the sense of holding out your hands in your neediness. We are all poor beggars reaching out to a gracious God who will provide for his people.

[54 : 11] And I think that's what's going on here that appeal to a cleansed heart to stand before the Lord with a clean conscience but also to stand before him with needy hearts desperate to receive.

And that's how we must come to him in our lives isn't it? That's what it means for us to come to the throne of God in our prayers if we're regarding sin in our hearts.

If we're saying to ourselves I can hide this sinful dirty stuff away from God but continue to pray continue to come to him without acknowledging my sin then we're not really standing up and lifting up our hands to God are we?

We're kind of coming to God with one hand hidden behind our back. children who know they've been caught out with their hand in the cookie jar but who hide it away.

And we're like that with the ugliness of our sin. That's why the call of God the call to be servants of the Lord is a call to mortify sin so that we can lift up clean hands to him but also to lift up these needy hands to him to recognize that he is the only one who can provide for the needs that we have.

[55 : 38] We need therefore to have that understanding of our relationship with God. But finally as the psalm draws to its conclusion I think the wording kind of changes and the blessing of God is then pronounced in these pilgrims and I think I used the word before would have been a benediction and I think that's the right way to think about it.

The blessing of God upon his people. We need the benediction. In the New Testament the language of it changes.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. May these things be upon you. May they be your experience. We need that reminder when we leave church on a Sunday and as we go into the week that's before us we need that reminder of what God has done for us in the fullness of the Trinity.

My friend Colin Dow preached a sermon just recently so you can listen to it on the Stornoway YouTube channel if you can find it about four weeks ago. It's the same thing that's happening here.

for these pilgrims who've arrived at Jerusalem at the end of their pilgrimage they've come to the temple they've arrived and they need to be given security they need to be reminded of their security where their hope lies and the truth is their hope doesn't lie in the fact that they've been good pilgrims and they've done a good job of arriving the blessing of the priests towards them is not well haven't you done well you've got here and you've done a great job on your pilgrimage well done the announcement to them is you have come to the place where the maker of heaven and earth interacts with the world that he has made and in this place he brings blessing and for the Israelites in the Old Testament that's what they needed they were always looking forward they knew the temple wasn't the literal place where their salvation was accomplished they knew the temple was simply pointing them towards something to come but that's what we need tonight as well that we would come to Jesus we come to the one who has made our salvation possible the one through whom the maker of heaven and earth the one who made all things and whose complete sovereign power is available to us in all of our circumstances and the one who is there to bless us and help us in everything that we go through in our lives and who is there to minister to us and who is there to lift us up when we are sinking and is there to sustain us when we are hungry and thirsty and who is there to clothe us when we are naked because our self righteousness has denuded us we need him the one who has made everything and the benediction at the end of the psalm is may that lord bless you from

[59 : 12] Zion may that tonight be your experience from the god of Golgotha may that be your experience from the holy spirit that has now been sent from the throne of god above may that be your experience of the love of the father who sustains and carries you through all things the one who made heaven and earth may you tonight know his blessing let's pray heavenly father we tonight need this assurance of the blessing of god we need to be like the pilgrims in fact in these songs who went from a place of war and hostility a place of strife in their lives looking for the place where their security was to be found their peace was to be had where the shalom of god was secured and to hear from that place that their blessing is available that their blessing has been and so father may that be our experience tonight as we would all of us draw near to Jesus as we would come to Christ may we find the benediction of his blessing and his love upon us and may your grace extend to us in the name of Jesus we ask this for his name sing amen we're going to sing in conclusion that psalm that psalm 134 it's just two stanzas behold bless ye the lord all ye that his attendants are even you that in God's temple be praise him nightly there lift your hands within God's holy place lift up and praise his name from Zion hill the lord be blessed that heaven and earth did frame I will sing the holy psalm to God's praise behold bless ye the lord all ye that is the genuine star in the land God's temple be and grace in night we have the hands within God's holy place wake up and great save from side o'er hill the he lands the dead and dead is vain

Now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with each one of you now and always. Amen.