

With Thee Whether in Life or in Death

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[0 : 00] Let us worship God by singing to his praise in Psalm 27.

Psalm 27 from the beginning of the Psalm. The Lord's my light and saving health, who shall make me dismayed? My life's strength is the Lord, of whom then shall I be afraid?

When as mine enemies and foes most wicked persons all, to eat my flesh against me rose, they stumbled and did fall. Against me the one host encamped, my heart yet fearless is.

Though war against me rise, I will be confident in this. One thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may within God's house remain, that I the beauty of the Lord behold me and admire, and that I in his holy place may reverently inquire.

For he in his pavilion shall we hide in evil days, in secret of his tent we hide, and on a rock we raise. Psalm 27 verses 1 to 5 to God's praise.

[1 : 11] The Lord's my light and saving health, who shall make me dismayed? The Lord's my light and saving health, who shall make me dismayed?

My life's strength is the Lord, of whom then shall I be afraid.

When God's mine enemies and foes most wicked persons all, To eat my flesh against me rose, they stumbled and did fall.

Against me, O God, I'm host and come, My heart yet fearless is.

Though one against me rise, I will be confident in this.

[3 : 10] One thing I hope the Lord desire, And will seek to obtain, That all days of my life I may, Within God's hands remain, That I am the beauty of the Lord, Behold me and admire, On the night I am his holy place,

Where and when he inquire, For he is the valiant, And shall be high than evil days.

In secret of his tent, Behind and God thou art mejest, Let us stand and call upon the name of God in prayer.

Gracious and ever-blessed God, Thou art holy, Thou that inhabitest the praise of Israel, and we seek to draw near to one who is holy with reverence and with godly fear.

Singing psalms with grace in our hearts, we pray, with faith, with a desire to draw near to the living God, but doing so mindful of whom it is, that we come to approach this evening, one who is high and who is lifted up, one who is glorious and majestic, King of kings and Lord of lords, O that we might know that Thou art a God who dwells in light, which no man can approach unto, who no man has seen nor can see, and yet one who has revealed himself in creation and in providence, and most clearly to us in the person of Thy Son, who is the brightness of Thy glory and the express image of Thy person.

[6 : 30] For no man has seen God, and yet in the person of Christ, we see He who is the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and full of truth, and of His fullness we receive, and those who have seen Him have seen the Father.

And so, Lord, we come thankful that the God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners, has spoken to our fathers, the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us through His Son, and we come together this evening to worship the triune God and to hear what God the Lord will speak.

We are mindful, Lord, of times in our own experience when Thou hast blessed us in the place where prayers want to be made, in the place where the Lord's people have gathered.

Sometimes we have come ill-prepared, not having given the time to prayer and meditation, beforehand that we ought to have given. And yet we have received blessings, and that may indeed be our experience this evening.

And yet we know, too, that it is often when we have been praying and preparing and readying ourselves for the house of God and for the service of His name and the preaching of His word, it is at these times when we are in the Spirit on the Lord's day before we come.

[8 : 09] And when we are in the Spirit of a Friday of communion, it's at these times that we have received blessing for our soul. And if we have come here, Lord, this evening ill-prepared, with the world yet in our thoughts, even as we walk through the doors of Thy church, the courts that we are called to enter into with praise, we pray that Thou would give us grace to prepare ourselves now and to ask Thee to ready your minds and to cleanse them and to take away all distracting thoughts and to give us grace by faith to enter into the holiest place, even into the presence of the King, the place where, as I was said, where two or three are gathered together in Thy name, that Thou would be there in the midst.

And so, Lord, we gather together today, this evening, seeking to lift up the name of our Saviour, to remember His death till He come, giving thanks for Thy mercy and kindness towards us in Christ, for we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We have all trodden Thy law under our feet, we have done that which is wicked in Thy sight, we have neglected the gospel and we have spurned its promises and its offers to us, and we would be yet dead in trespasses and sins, were it not for the grace of Thy Spirit, calling us out of darkness and into Thy marvellous light, working in us newness of life, faith, hope, love, trust not in ourselves, but in Him who loved His people and who gave Himself for them.

And so, Lord, we ask Thee over this weekend that Thou would refresh us in our souls, that we would know times of refreshing, as the Church of old has known, in this place and in other places, that we might be comforted if we are laid low this evening and over these weeks, and indeed as it may be over these months and years, that we might be revived in our souls, that we might be strengthened in the inner man, that we might learn more and more to comprehend the love of Christ in all of its height and its depth and its width and its breadth, and that we might know the comfort and the blessing that comes with a view of Him in all of His splendor, in all of His glory, in His portion and in His finished work.

For, Lord, we can do nothing without Him. We are nothing, and we have nothing without Him. We are hell-worthy sinners, through Thy wrath and Thy curse, but, O, we bless Thee, that there is a way of salvation through the Gospel, that whosoever believeth in Thy Son, Jesus Christ, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

[11 : 27] And so, Lord, we ask Thee to bless us with that everlasting life this evening, with the firstfruits of it, for this is life eternal, that we might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent, or reveal Him to us this evening.

Speak to us, give us ears to hear, open our hearts, even as the heart of Lydia was opened under the word long ago, that we might know an opening of our own hearts or a warming of our hearts, for how easy it is for our love to wax cold, how easy it is for us to become formal and lifeless and lukewarm in our religion.

And yet we worship our living Saviour, one who died upon the cross, but on the third day rose again, and who is even this evening exalted upon the right hand of Thy Majesty, where He makes continual intercession for us.

O Lord, we pray then that His intercession might be efficacious in our own Christian experience and the experience of our church and of our nation.

Bless this congregation, we pray Thee. Bless the pulpit and bless Mr. MacDonald, the minister. Be gracious to him and uphold him and give him tokens for his labour and a fruit for his work.

[12 : 58] And we pray that the office bearers might know Thy blessing to be upon them too as they seek to lead in righteousness and bless the members of the congregation and the adherence of the congregation too.

O we pray that they might know the Holy Spirit of God resting upon them, reviving them, and refreshing them and enabling them to serve, to worship and to witness.

We pray for the many in these villages who are yet out of Christ without hope and without God in the world. And we thank Thee that though they be in darkness themselves, that there is a gospel light in the community and that Thy word is preached and that men and women are called to taste and see that God is good and that who trusts and who is blessed.

And we pray that they might come into the church here and hear the word. And we thank Thee for those who do, for those adherence who, though having no saving faith themselves, yet have an adherence and a loyalty to the church and are willing to come and to listen to the preaching of the word.

And we pray that that word might not leave them as it found them, and we know that it will harden or it will soften. It will be a savor of death unto death or a savor of life unto life.

[14 : 22] And we pray indeed that it might be the latter. Oh, God, we are in dire need as a people, as a church on the island and in our nation of Thee to open the windows of heaven and to pour out a blessing upon us so that there might not be room to receive it.

We see no other way. we are mindful that we can do nothing in and of ourselves but continue to seek to be faithful. Help us to do so, to be faithful and to be prayerful and to wait upon Thee, pleading Thy promises and remembering that Christ will indeed build His church so that the gates of hell should not prevail against it.

But we pray, Lord, and we long that something of that church might be left here. and as we are a people who have known great privilege and have had great blessings and have had the gospel in its purity on this island for 200 years, oh, we pray that we might have it for another 200 years, that our children and our children's children and their children, children and generations yet unborn, that they might yet praise and magnify the Lord through the preaching of the word in these pulpits and in our villages and in our districts.

Bless us now, Lord, bless the reading of Thy word to us in the preaching of it and the conscionable hearing of it and give us grace to hear and hearts to receive and strengthen us and prepare us and forgive us graciously for our sin.

For Christ's sake, Amen. Amen. Let us now sing again this time in Psalm 61. O God, give ear unto my cry, unto my prayer attend.

[16 : 26] From the utmost corner of the land my cry to Thee I'll send. What time my heart is overwhelmed and in perplexity to Thou me lead unto the rock that higher is than I?

For Thou hast for my refuge been a shelter by Thy power and for defence against my foes Thou hast been a strong tower. Within Thy tabernacle I forever will abide and under covered of Thy wings with confidence me hide.

For Thou the vows that I did make, O Lord, my God is here. Thou hast given me the heritage of those Thy name that fear. Let us sing these five verses of Psalm 61 to God's praise.

O God, give ear unto my cry, unto my prayer attend. O God, give ear unto my cry, unto my prayer attend.

From yon the story of the land, my cry to Thee God send.

[17 : 53] what time my heart is overwhelmed and dimmer feckity do come into flu.

O God, no Son, No! way to the Jaw to theath that I have art and I either have made the life or the Son, Father, my I refuse thee a sheltered life like I, and for his death against my cause, the last we have some time.

Within my power now shall I fall there with a light, and just the power of thy ways will long protect me right.

For love is the first that I've given thee, O Lord, my love is here, the house in me, the heaven is here, O Lord, my name, the fear.

Let us now read God's Word as we find it in the Old Testament Scriptures and in the second book of Samuel, in chapter 15. Second Samuel, chapter 15, and reading together from the beginning of the chapter.

[21 : 03] And it came to pass after this that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early and stood beside the way of the gate.

And it was so that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel.

And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right, but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, O that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice.

And it was so that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand and took him and kissed him. And in this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king of her judgment.

So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. And it came to pass after forty years that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord in Hebron.

[22 : 20] For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord.

And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.

And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem that were called, and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel, the Gilanite, David's counselor, from his city, even from Gilead, while he offered sacrifices.

And the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom. And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.

And David said unto all the servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise and let us flee, for we shall not else escape from Absalom. Make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.

[23 : 44] And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint. And the king went forth and all his household after him, and the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house.

And the king went forth and all the people after him, and hurried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on beside him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men, which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.

Then the king said to Idai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? Return to thy place and abide with the king, for thou art a stranger and also an exile.

Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? Seeing I go whether I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren.

Mercy and truth be with thee. And it I answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

[25 : 06] And David said to Idai, Go and pass over. And Idai the Gittite passed over, and all his men and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over.

The king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness, and so on.

Amen. We pray that the Lord would bless his own word to us, and to his name be all the praise and all the glory. Let us sing now from Psalm 3.

Psalm 3, and the title of this psalm, it's a psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom, his son. The context, the chapter that we have been reading, shares the context of this psalm.

O Lord, how are my foes increased? Against me many rise. Many say of my soul, for whom in God no succor lies. Yet thou my shield and glory art, the uplifter of mine head.

[26 : 14] I cried, and from his holy hill the Lord me answer made. I laid me down and slept. I waked, for God sustained me. I will not fear, though thousands tenderly set round against me be.

Arise, O Lord, save me, my God. For thou, my foes, hast stroke all on the cheekbone, and the teeth of wicked men hast broke. Salvation doth appertain unto the Lord alone.

Thy blessing, Lord, forevermore thy people is upon. Let us sing, then, the whole of Psalm 3, to God's praise. O Lord, how are my foes increased?

Against me many rise. O Lord, how are my foes increased?

against me many rise? When ye say of my soul forever, in God's love, in God's love, in God's love, in God's love, yet will my children glory are, the plethora of my death, I'll cry, I'm gone, I'll cry, I'm gone, this holy death, the Lord be answered me.

[28 : 17] I'll lay me down, and set thy way, for those of the sick in me, I will not fear, Lord, as I'm scared, set round against me be.

Arise, O Lord, save me, my God, for thou my foes hast shown.

O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, the chief, O Lord, the chief, of wicked men, the school.

O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, I am the Lord, I give the Lord as the Lord.

Well, now with a view to God's blessing, if you would turn with me to the portion of Scripture which we read, and we can take our text this evening from verse 21, 2 Samuel chapter 15, verse 21.

[30 : 41] And it I answered the king and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my Lord the king liveth, surely in what place my Lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

It I the Gittite is one of the lesser known Scripture characters. We're not told a great deal about him. We meet him here in 2 Samuel 15, and we meet him once or twice later on in the book of Samuel.

But apart from that, we don't know a great deal about him, apart from what he tells us about himself here. And what we find, I think, is a beautiful example of devotion to the king.

An example of service to King David, despite the difficult situation, the dangerous situation that he finds himself in.

An example of loyalty in a difficult day. And I think that there is much that we can learn from this example concerning our own position before the king and our own relationship with the king.

[32 : 08] We ourselves live in a day when the king of kings is not popular. And yet, I want us to ask ourselves this evening, are we as loyal to Christ?

Are we as loyal to our king, to our God, as Ittai the Gittite was to King David? And I think we can say as well, to the God of King David.

Now, the context here, as I'm sure many of you know, is that the king has backslidden. He has sinned against God. He has had an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, and he has committed murder through ordering the death of her husband for no good reason.

And that doesn't happen in a vacuum either. He had obviously drifted away from the Lord. He had become complacent, and he wasn't watchful as he ought to have been.

And though he did, by this point he has repented. He has repented. Nathan has come to him, and he has told him the story of the man and the lamb.

[33 : 24] And he has said to him, Thou art the man. And David has realized that he indeed is the man, that he is the one who has taken the wife of another.

And he is the one who has sinned against the Lord. So he repents. But it's important for us to remember that, although repentance brings us back to the Lord, the sins that we have committed, which we have repented of, that they still have consequences.

And they would have consequences for King David. God had said to him, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. And that is what we are seeing here.

David's disloyal son, Absalom, has made a conspiracy against him, to oust him out of his own throne, and to take over as king.

He's seen his opportunity, and behind David's back, he has been working, working slowly, working behind the scenes, working to steal the hearts of the people.

[34 : 32] And we read at the beginning of this chapter what he did. It was normal for the people to come in from the surrounding tribes into Jerusalem to see the king, or to see the king's judges, his delegates, his deputies, as it were, in order to get justice for themselves because of a particular case, maybe a case to do with land, or to do with property, or to do with marriage, or whatever it might have been.

And they would come into the gate, and we think of a gate as something that you open and close to get in and out of a place. And it was that, but it was more than that. The gate of Jerusalem and the gate of many of these cities were actual buildings, buildings with rooms in them.

And in and around these gates, the judges of the land would meet, and they would hear certain cases, and they would make decisions, and they would give people justice.

Well, Absalom decided that he was going to stand outside the gate, and he was going to meet the people before they came. And he was going to hear their case, and then he would say to them, See, thy matters are good and right.

In other words, you have a case, you have a case, but there's no man deputed of the king to hear thee. There's no judge to give you your justice.

[35 : 49] Now, this was probably a lie, or it was certainly a stretch of the truth. He was being deceitful here. He was, I think, giving David a bad name.

We shouldn't believe everything that Absalom says about David, although David was certainly, to an extent he, whether it's right to say that he was out of favor, maybe not, but certainly he wasn't at the pinnacle of his career, and he wasn't as favored with the people as he had been, although I think that we can say that he did have their hearts before this conspiracy started.

But then Absalom said, Oh, that I were made judge in the land, then every man which has any suit or cause might come to me, and I would do him justice. If I was in power, things would be better.

That's, of course, nothing new to us, is it? Whether it's the conservatives in power, whether it's labor in power in our country, whoever isn't in power can always say, Well, if I was there, things would be better.

And they don't have to prove anything. They don't have to show any results. It's all that they have to say. If I was there, these people wouldn't be struggling. There wouldn't be so much injustice, and that's what he's doing.

[37 : 10] And he's trying to come alongside the people and to befriend the people for his own causes, of course. And through this, we read that Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel, stole them from King David.

And then he pretends that he has made a vow and that he's got a religious sacrifice to make. And so he goes off to Hebron in order to execute his treasonous plan.

We read that he sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, those whom he had made friends with, those who he had got on side. And the spies were to say to the people, As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, Absalom reigns in Hebron.

And that's what happened. And the people increased continually with Absalom, for the conspiracy was strong.

So Absalom's plan worked. A lot of the people were deceived into favouring him and, as it were, voting for him.

[38 : 23] A good politician, well, do I use that word good lightly, but a politician who knows how to get ahead, knows how to deceive the people, knows how to win the votes of the people, whether he will be good for them or whether he will not.

So it is with Absalom. And David realises that the people have turned against him. There came a messenger saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise and let us flee, for we shall not else escape from Absalom.

Make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring evil upon us and smite the city with the edge of the sword. Some say that it was cowardice on his part to flee the city.

Matthew Hendry says that he fled the city in order to protect the city because if the city was going to be besieged, then the city itself that he loved so much that he had been so instrumental in building and the tabernacle around about it as well, then it would have been destroyed.

There would have been much death and he loved the city too much. And I think it's Dale Ralph Davis who adds to that that in leaving the city as well, he could see who was loyal to him and who wasn't.

[39 : 48] Had he stayed, he wouldn't have been sure about that. But in actually leaving and putting distance between himself and Jerusalem, he could see who was faithful.

He could see who was going to follow him. And that leads us really to a subject this evening because although the hearts of the people were with Absalom, it's evident that there were some whose heart was still with David.

There is always a faithful remnant to God's anointed, to God's king. That is true. The church, there will always be a church in the world.

There may not always be a church in Covenants or in Kinloch or in Carloway or in Shabbos. But the Lord will always have his people somewhere. And what we have here are the Lord's people, those who are faithful to the Lord's king.

And we read of them here in verse 17 that the king went forth and all the people after him and tarried in a place that was far off. And I wonder if that is a summary verse and then it tells us how this came to pass in verse 18.

[41 : 06] And all the servants passed on beside him and all the Cherethites and all the Pelethites and all the Gittites, 600 men which came after him from Gath passed on before the king.

So there are a people still, they are numerically in the minority certainly, but there are people who are following David. And what he does here is he leaves the city with them.

And Jerusalem is built on a hill or hills and they come down the hill and it seems that David has been near the front and then when he gets down to the brook Kidron, the brook that Christ himself passed over the night that he was forsaken, the night that he was betrayed and then forsaken by his disciples.

on his way to the Mount of Olives. Well, this is where David is standing. It's as it were he's standing on the Jerusalem side of the brook Kidron and he's watching all the people and he can see there the people who are faithful to him and he can see the people who are not faithful to him.

He can see who is there and he can see who is not there. And you can tell a lot by who is there and who is not there.

[42 : 28] You can tell a lot friends by who is in church and who is not in church. Who is in church both ends in the Lord's day and who is not in church both ends in the Lord's day.

You can tell a lot by who's in a prayer meeting and who's not in a prayer meeting. You can tell a good deal by who comes out to communion services and who doesn't.

And ministers stand as it were at the brook Kidron and they see who's there and your elders see who's there and who's not there. And David stood and he saw who was with him and who was missing, who had the question mark of absence over them.

But he notices especially this the time the Gittite. He seems to be the leader of the Gittites.

The Gittites were from Gath. That's where the word Gittite comes from, from that word Gath, which was one of the main cities of Philistia. So this the Gittite was a Philistine.

[43 : 37] Now David had spent time in Gath. He had pretended to be crazy in Gath. Some people say that it wasn't his best time and yet there was something about him that attracted this man and his followers.

There was something about David and we see that. We see the way that the relationship developed with the Philistines and how he earned their trust and how they earned to love him. Well, some followed him and some were loyal to him.

And this man appears to have been one of them with the 600 men that followed him. And David says to him, he says, Wherefore goest thou also with us?

Why do you go with us? He says, Return to thy place and abide with the king, for thou art a stranger and also an exiler.

So he says to him, it's a test. God will be to God will be in his trouble if they don't really know what's going on or if their heart isn't in it.

[44 : 48] God will be to be persecuted for righteousness sake if they themselves weren't righteous, if they themselves weren't in Christ.

I think a common humanity would want that not to be the case. But I think that there is a test here as well. David has come to a point in his life, a point in his kingship, when he needs to know who is loyal to him.

He needs to know who is faithful. He needs to know whose allegiance is genuine. And so he says to him, he says, why are you going with us?

He says, you only came here yesterday. Should I make thee go up and down with us this day, seeing I go, whether I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren.

Mercy and truth be with thee. He's saying, you're new, you're not a Jew, you have no obligation to be here, you haven't made any promises to me, probably you're not circumcised, I can't ask you to roam about the wilderness with us, to go hungry with us, to sleep with the sky as you're sailing with us, you go back, you remain with the king, abide with the king, abide with Absalom, he says.

[46 : 21] And that's really what makes us think of this as a test, because David doesn't recognize Absalom as the king, does he? he knows that he himself is the king, and yet he says to Adai the Giddag, you abide with the king, as if he saying to him, well, do you think that this is really the king?

And he sends him off, sends him off with his blessing, you go and you have my blessing, he says, I won't hold it against you. And we put like when Ruth and Orba were following their mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem.

And Naomi turns around and says to Ruth, behold, thy sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after thy sister-in-law, you go back as well.

This is going to be too hard for you. It's too much of a commitment. There may be suffering, there is no husband for you here, there is no future for you here, the prospects are bleak, Ruth, you go back.

It's the same kind of thing, isn't it? And how do we understand that, apart from to say that it was a test of faithfulness? Again, I'm not saying that there isn't an element of the genuine in it, and an element of pity and love in it.

[47 : 47] But I think that that's the main thing that comes out, it is a test. And I think it's a relevant test for us as well. the world will tell you to go back.

Satan will tell you to return. If you're standing on the brink, whether it be the brink of a profession of faith, or the brink of remaining faithful, Satan will say to you, he will try to steal your heart, and the world will try to steal your heart, and they will say to you, you go back.

Go back, don't stay, what's the point? You have no real obligations here. What is a church? What's a church ever done for you? Why do you have to listen to them? Why do you have to be faithful to them?

Why do you have to be here week in, week out? Why does that book have to dictate what you do? You go back, and if you allow it, if you listen, then before you know it, your heart will be stolen.

But more than that, I think that David isn't here speaking for the devil, is he? And he's not here speaking for Absalom. He is God's anointed.

[48 : 57] He is the king, he is the leader of Israel, and he's saying this. And I think, friends, that there are times that, just as David said this, and Naomi said this, that the church needs to say it as well.

The church needs to say, return, go back if your heart isn't in it. You know, we've been too quick at times to push people forward to make a profession, to push people forward to the Lord's table, without explaining to them what really that entails, what it means, what it costs, without calling people to count the cost.

And I think that's what David was doing here. We ought, friends, to lay the dangers before people. Not tell them everything will be fine when you make a profession, everything will be okay, life will be easy, there will be no challenges, no temptations, not at all.

We ought to tell them what it is, what the Christian life is, and its reality, and its power. It is a life of self-denial, friends. It is a life of cross-bearing.

That's what it is. We've got to be able to say to them that from the perspective of the world, your immediate prospects as a member of the church, as a professing Christian, they are poor.

[50 : 21] They are poor. You know, friends, we live in a day when the tide is turning, and you know it, and you've seen it. And we live in a day when Christianity isn't in the ascendancy, as it has been at different times in history, and in the history of our island.

We live in a time where Christianity is barely tolerated, barely tolerated. We live in a day of unbelief. We live in a day of immorality.

We live in a day of treachery, outside the church, and within what is called the church, nationwide, and in the western world.

church. And you know this, at such a time, it's no small thing to become a member of the church. It is no small thing to remain a member of the church.

To be a Christian, to be a faithful man or a faithful woman to God, in such a day as this, it is not for the faint-hearted, and it's certainly not for the half-hearted.

[51 : 27] And it's not for the fair-weather Christian, because the chances are that the weather won't be fair for you. It's crucial, friends, that the church be honest, and that we say, if your heart isn't in it, if you're not sure, if you're being pushed into it, don't make a commitment to Christ if you're not sure.

Don't make a commitment to the church if you're not sure. It's the last thing you need. The last thing you need, if your heart isn't in it, is to make a commitment to the church.

Better for you to wait, better for you to pray, better for you to read the word, and to hear the word preached, and to give it time, and to make your calling, and your election sure, and to work out your faith, and your salvation, with fear, and with trembling, because to make a commitment, and then not to be true to it, will leave you further away than you ever are.

Now, it's the last thing you need, and the last thing the church needs, fair-weather Christians, half-hearted Christians. You know, the church will survive, as I said, may not survive in certain places, may not survive here, but you know, it's often been the case that when the church in a certain place hasn't survived, when it has closed, it's often been the case that it's not because of attacks from without, it's because of compromise, and half-heartedness, and faithlessness from within.

Those who made commitments, those who took to themselves something which did not belong to them, because their heart was not in it, and Christ was not their king.

[53 : 27] But here was a man who was told all of that, who was told about the dangers, who was told about the trials that lay ahead of them. Here was a man who was given every opportunity to get out, and to get out with the blessing of the king, and in the favour of the king, and yet he did not, and yet he could not.

And I hope that that's you this evening. as I tell you of the difficulty of being a Christian in our day, as I tell you about the bleak prospects, and the dangers, and the persecutions which will certainly come your way, I hope that you too will say, yes, I understand that, but I can do no other.

I can follow no other. The love of Christ constrains me. let us see then this man's response, just briefly two things.

Firstly, his loyalty. Yet I answered the king and said, as the lord liveth, and as the lord my king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

That is loyalty, first of all. as the lord liveth, as the lord liveth, he's calling the lord Jehovah, Yahweh, to witness what he is saying.

[54 : 57] This is a profession, this is an oath, it's a vow, we were singing there about the vows that the lord's people make before the lord and before his people.

I'll pay my vows now to the lord before his people. all. That's what this is. It is a public profession, it is a public promise, and he's calling the lord himself as the lord lives, the lord who will live forever more, he's calling him to witness it.

And let us put this into context, as the lord lives and as my lord the king lives. Now what has David said to him?

He said, return to the king. Abide with the king. You go and you will be okay with king Absalom. And Adai is saying here, while other people may recognize him as their king, other people might recognize his sovereignty, but I don't.

He is not my king. He is not the ruler of my life, but you are, David. You are. you may not be popular.

[56 : 16] Absalom, your very own son, may have betrayed you. And Ahithophel, your own counselor, your right hand man, may have forsaken you.

But I won't take an easy route like Ahithophel did. I'm not a glory hunter like he is.

I will be loyal to God's king, to God's anointed, the one that the Lord Jehovah has made to be king. I will protect the truth before I protect myself.

You know, friends, when we profess, and I'm not just speaking to those who haven't professed, maybe thinking about it, but I'm speaking to the Lord's people here who may have professed a long time ago, because a profession isn't something that you just do when you come to a church session.

A profession is something that you uphold throughout your life. You are a professing man, not a professing woman. But when you profess, when you call yourself a Christian, when you say that you serve him, then you are calling God to witness your profession.

[57 : 33] You are calling men to witness your promises. You are saying, as the Lord lives, this is who I am as a member of the church. This is what I am. This is who I serve.

It is a declaration of loyalty. That's what it is to profess faith. That's what it is to come forward at communion services. That's what it is to remain a member of the church.

It is to say this, my loyalty is not to this world. I don't live for this world, for the pleasures of this world and for its philosophies, for its power and for its honor and for its reputation, what it promises to give me and what it can give me.

I don't live for that. My heart used to belong to the prince of the world. He stole it. But it belongs to him no more.

My allegiance isn't to the prince of the power of the air. My allegiance is to King Jesus. My allegiance is to the greater son of David. That is a profession that we make.

[58 : 37] And you know, friends, it's not a popular thing to say today. It's not even a popular thing to say in your island, to tell your friends, to tell neighbors, to tell colleagues that you're a Christian, that you're one of the Lord's people, that you're a member of the free church or any other church.

It's not a popular thing. And you know, it's going to become, unless the Lord, and we pray that he will, unless he turn things again, it's going to become more and more unpopular.

The tide, friends, is against us. And it is against the church. And it's more and more difficult for people, for the Lord's people, to get on in life, to get on in careers, and to still be faithful to the Lord.

And yet we have to be able to say, that whatever it cost me, whatever people say about me, my allegiance is to Christ. And so there is loyalty here, but related to that, secondly, there is commitment.

Because what is loyalty? Loyalty is a practical thing, isn't it? It's a practical thing. Loyalty doesn't just speak. Loyalty acts. And so it does here.

[59 : 54] Surely in what place, my Lord, the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be. Wherever you are, whether you be in the wilderness, whether you be in the city, whether you be sleeping in a cave or sleeping in a palace, I'll be there with you.

I would forsake the Lord's anointed. And this isn't just love for David. It's not just loyalty and respect for David.

It is for David's God as well, isn't it? Because isn't that what makes the Lord's people attractive? Not themselves, but what the Lord has done in them.

What he has seen of David's religion, what he has seen of David's worship, what he has seen of David's king has worked in this commitment to serve him.

And he's saying, though people louse you, though your own people turn against you, though the world hate you, I will be your servant, he's saying. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health and in joy and in sorrow, I will serve you, he is saying.

[61 : 12] Indeed, should it lead to death? Should it lead to my death and battle as I fight for you? Should it lead to me being stabbed in my sleep at night by the spies and by the men of Absalom?

So be it. I'll have died in the Lord and with the people of the Lord. And the thing is here, he's not just speaking for himself. He's not just entrusting himself to the king and entrusting himself to the Lord.

He's speaking for his people and he's speaking for his family. We read at the end of verse 22 that Ittai the Gittai passed over and all his men and all the little ones that were with him.

There were men and there were women and there were children here. And it's as if he's saying, well, whatever other people do, whatever they say, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord and we will serve the Lord's anointed.

Indeed, should it lead to death? Should it lead to the death of the woman and the death of the children? Even then, we'll have done the right thing.

[62 : 25] Even though we lose everything, even though it come to nothing, even though Absalom remained as king, we'll have done that which is right by the king, the true king and right by the Lord.

Even if we lose our lives, does Paul not say the same thing of Epaphroditus and in Philippians too? He said, for the work of Christ, he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life.

His life wasn't precious to him. It was more important for him to do the work of Christ, even though it bring him to death. It was worth dying for.

What an encouragement this must have been to David himself, in his own sorrows, as he saw the people who weren't there. And you know, friends, we can say this as well from the perspective of the pulpit and from the perspective of the elders few.

Although it's often discouraging to see those who aren't there, it's almost always encouraging to see those who are. And sometimes it's not the ones that you would expect.

[63 : 35] What an encouragement it must have been for David, not just to see Itai the Gittite, but to hear what he had to say. To hear the testimony of this man.

Paul said of Epaphroditus, he often refreshed me and wasn't ashamed of my chains. So it was with David and Itai the Gittite.

There's echoes of Ruth here as well, aren't there? Ruth, Itai the Gittite, refused to go away. Ruth refused to go away. Entreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee.

For whether thou goest, I will go. Where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people. And thy God, my God. Where thou diest, there I will die.

And there I will be buried. Can you say that of the Lord and of his people? Thy people shall be my people.

[64 : 37] Thy God, my God. You know, friends, a Christian profession is a promise and a commitment to serve the Lord in life and even up until death.

It is a promise of faithfulness. A promise to never dishonor, to never forsake, to never deny the King.

None of us knows what we would be like, what we would do in a time of persecution. If a gun is put to your head or to the head of a child or a grandchild or a brother or a sister or a father or a mother.

None of us know what we would do. But the Christian says, I hope that I would be able to be faithful to the Lord and not deny him. The Christian seeks to follow God before men and to honor God before men.

And like Itai the Gittite, you promise to be where your king is and to be where his people are, to stand for him, to live for him, even to suffer for him, if that is what it costs.

[65 : 50] Itai showed great boldness, but, you know, the Bible never tells us the whole story. And often it doesn't tell us the feelings of these men and these women and the thought processes that they had.

And I don't doubt, I think we can be sure that this man did have anxieties for his life, that he did think about that, that he perhaps had fears for the future.

I think it's only fear, it's only human to say that he did. But this is the thing, his love for David and his love for David's God made him bold.

He believed in the cause and he trusted in the king. And he trusted that this was God's anointed and God's king.

And that the Lord would do him good. You too will have anxieties and you will have fears for the present, perhaps for the future as well.

[66 : 53] But your love for Christ and your trust in the king, that he does all things well for his people, will embolden you to stand as well.

Let us conclude with this. Verse 22. And David said to Itai, go and pass over. And Itai the Gittite passed over and all those men and all the little ones that were with him.

David is standing on the banks, as it were, of this little brook, watching everyone going over. And he says to Itai, he says to him, he recognizes the faithfulness of this man.

He recognizes that he is genuine. He recognizes that this man is loyal. Other people might look loyal. They might speak loyal. But this man is loyal.

This is a man that I can trust. This is a man who will be worth his weight in gold to me. And you know he was.

[68 : 02] Itai started at a bad time. He started following David at a bad time, didn't he? Not when David was at the heights of his kingdom, at the heights of his popularity, but when he was in the very depths, depths of despair, his own son, what a shame, what a disgrace.

His own son has turned against him and caused him to flee from Jerusalem. It's at this time that Itai has come, has found himself following David.

But you know, he came into David's kingdom for such a time as this. And he was faithful to David at such a time as this. And he was used for David. You know, one of the other times that we read of this man is when David makes him a captain over a third of his army with Joab and with another man, I think Joab's brother.

Itai the Gittite, this unknown, this Philistine, is given the honour of being the captain over a third of David's army. He came at a bad time, but he came for the time that the Lord had given him.

And you know, friends, arguably now is a bad time to be following the Lord. Now, let us put that into context. It's not that bad. It could be a lot worse. You could be in parts of the Middle East or Africa where the church is persecuted.

[69 : 31] But we can say this too, that the church isn't in the ascendancy. Communion services aren't full. You don't see Christians as often as you used to.

There aren't as many fellowships as we were. There isn't the same opportunity to grow. There isn't the same, you might say, spirit amongst the Lord's people and desire.

And in many ways, it's a difficult time. A time when you need to work harder at it. A time when you aren't just going to be pulled along. But it's our time.

And it is our day. And the Lord has placed you here and not there. And now and not then. And the church today needs you. And it needs you to be committed.

And it needs you to be faithful. It needs men and women like Itai. We're living in a day when the church needs our old to be faithful. And our middle age to be faithful.

[70 : 29] And let me say, especially our young, our young, to be faithful to the Lord, to be faithful to the King, to be willing to suffer reproach, if that's what it will cost, to be willing to be reviled, persecuted, have all, have men say all manner of evil against you falsely.

But to believe that you are on the side of truth. That you are on the side of the Lord. That you are on the side of the King.

The church needs committed people. The church needs people whose heart is in it. Our church sessions would welcome young men and women, older men and women, who say, well, I might feel that I might not have a great deal to give, but my heart is in it.

And I want to serve. And I want to come out on the Lord's side. Oh, how glad the church sessions of our island would be to meet these people and to see them and to see each and every one of us, friends, living no longer for ourselves, but for our King who died for us and who rose again.

Amen. Let us pray. Gracious God and King, oh, we pray for men and women to be raised up to serve the Lord and with their whole hearts and all with their whole minds and with all of their strength.

[72 : 14] Oh, raise them up, Lord, have pity upon us in our day and revive thy work in the midst of the years and in wrath remember mercy. Lord, we cannot accept that thou hast forsaken us because thou hast been so good to us hitherto.

Hitherto the Lord hath helped us and hitherto thou hast helped us as a church and as a people and thou hast built up the walls of society and restored our cities and we pray that thou wouldst continue to do so and add to our number such as should be saved.

Bless us now and go before us and forgive us graciously for sin. For Christ's sake, Amen. Let us sing in Psalm 56 the end of the psalm from verse 9.

My foes shall when I cry turn back I know it God is for me and God his word I'll praise his word and God shall praise it be and God I trust I will not fear what man can do to me thy vows upon me are O God I'll render praise to thee wilt thou not who from death may save my feet from falls keep free to walk before God in the light of those that live in thee Psalm 56 verses 9 to the end God's praise My foes shall when I cry turn back I know it God is for me My foes shall when I cry turn back I know it God is for me God is for me

Vow the■■■ and God way I trust I will not fear what I'm after to me.

[74 : 47] Liars upon me, O Lord, how render grace to thee.

Will thou not to drop, let me save my feet from false and free.

To walk before God in the night of those that live in me.

I want a word of thanks to Mr. Murray for his message this evening.

Our prayer is that it be blessed to each one of us. The service is tomorrow. It commends with the morning prayer meeting at 11am. The service at noon will be taken by Mr. Murray.

[76 : 08] And the Shabbat Lingual prayer meeting at 6pm. Following the benediction just now, the Kirk session will constitute and an opportunity will be given to anyone who belongs to the congregation who desires to make public profession of their faith in Christ for the first time.

These are the intimations. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.