

Christ Loved The Church

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Date: 13 September 2020

[0 : 00] We are going to begin our service singing to God's praise from Psalm 89.

Psalm 89 from the beginning of the Psalm. God's mercies I will ever sing and with my mouth I shall thy faithfulness make to be known to generations all.

For mercy shall be built, said I, forever to endure. Thy faithfulness even in the heavens thou wilt establish sure.

I with my chosen one have made a covenant graciously and to my servant whom I love to David sworn have I. That I thy seed establish shall forever to remain and will to generations all thy throne build and maintain.

The praises of thy wonders, Lord, the heavens shall express. And in the congregation of saints thy faithfulness. For who in heaven with the Lord may once himself compare, who is like God among the sons of those that mighty are.

[1 : 14] God's mercies I will ever sing. God's mercies I will ever sing.

God's mercies I will ever sing and with my heart I shall thy faithfulness I will ever sing.

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faces all by wonder, Lord, the heaven shall express.

And in the congregation of saints thy faithful rest.

[3 : 57] For you in heaven with the Lord, he wants himself only.

Who is thy God among the sons of those that mighty are?

Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray. Most gracious and ever-blessed God, we give thanks that we can sing of your mercies.

For they are before us each day as your servant of old confessed. That they are new each morning and great is your faithfulness.

We give thanks for every way in which we can recognize them and acknowledge them. And many others besides which we fail to appreciate and certainly fail to acknowledge.

[5 : 16] We crave forgiveness for every transgression in the way in which we do not discern your input into our lives as our God.

For our life is often so man-centered. Even focusing on ourselves. Upon what we are and what we are doing.

And we neglect to do what we ought to do by nature. For we are created for your glory. For we are created for your glory.

And yet, even such as have been redeemed from the selfish, inward-looking life that is so much part of the fallen man's experience.

Having been redeemed from that, we still fall prey to our former leanings and our former transgressions.

- [6 : 28] We pray forgiveness for every way in which we sin in thought, in word and in deed. And we pray for mercy. And we pray for grace to help in time of need.
- Thankful that you are a God of grace. And that you are a God who supplies to us the remedy for our fallen condition.
- So much so that we know to come to you just as many before us have come. Seeking that you would show your face to us in favour.
- With the prayer, Lord, bless and pity us. Shine on us with your face. That the earth, your way and nations all might know your saving grace.
- We give thanks, Lord, that you are one who answers such a prayer. And all who come to you with such a plea and such a petition.
- [7 : 33] We are assured of an answer as they offer it in and through the name of our Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. We pray for your blessing today upon our homes and our families.
- Remembering all that we would entrust to your care and keeping. Those of our number that we know that have special need. We pray for your blessing to be apportioned to them.
- Any who may be unwell. Any who may be suffering from pain. In their bodies and in their minds and in their hearts. We know that we live in this world which brings all of these things into our experience from time to time.
- So we pray for your people in particular. That need your grace and appreciate your grace. Even though you impart your grace to those who have no ability to recognise it or appreciate it or even acknowledge it.
- There are common evidences of that grace being imparted to us. In that you keep from us that which we are undoubtedly deserving of receiving from you as a judge of the quick and the dead.
- [8 : 48] You are the God who has promised one day to bring to judgement this world. That you have stayed your hand up until this point.
- While we do experience evidences of your displeasure. We pray that you would pour out your spirit upon us. That we would see more evidences of your grace.
- So we pray that you would remember our nation. This time in particular and all the nations of the earth. As we once again bring before you the needs that arise out of the current pandemic.
- As it influences the lives of so many. When we see once again a decline in the projection that has been made in the past.
- That showed an improvement. Now we are seeing evidences of more and more succumbing to this virus. More and more testing positive.
- [9 : 54] And in need of care being taken with regard to how they behave. And others who have succumbed to it in a more pronounced way.
- Perhaps being taken to hospital. And in need of being cared for by others. And that is the great fear. And we bring such fears to you. And ask that you would show mercy.
- And that you would equip us one and all to do what is best. For ourselves and for our fellows here in the world. To that end we pray for doctors and nurses and carers.
- And we pray for politicians. We pray for the Prime Minister. The First Minister. Various cabinets of the parts of the United Kingdom. The governments that are appointed to rule well.
- We know that they do not apply to you as they ought. And we pray forgiveness for that. And you would impart wisdom to them. That they may know to look to the Lord.

[11 : 00] We pray Lord that you would bless the nations of the earth. Especially those who have greater need than we have ourselves. We know that there are places that have suffered from not only the virus that we are praying for healing from.

But that there are other issues that are staring them in the face. There is want of a physical sort.

Where they are without shelter, without food. Some are displaced and driven away from their homes. And they seek a place where they will experience the humanity of their fellows.

And too often the door is shut in their face. And we pray for all these places where many congregate and who suffer because of that.

We remember the Yemen. We remember all the various parts of the world where war has ravaged the earth. And consequences of that. We pray for the nations that have suffered from natural disaster.

[12 : 21] We remember again the United States of the present where war where fire has wreaked havoc throughout the parts of the country.

And we see the one nation after another suffering from drought. And as a consequence the damage that results is there to be seen.

So we pray for those who have suffered in these situations. We remember those whose role it is to make sure that those who are in danger are kept safe.

We remember Lord the need that we have in the face of great eternity. A provision is made for us in the Gospel.

And that we may be diligent in all ways. In seeking to prolong life and to ensure that we have all the good things that life can bring. But neglect our soul.

[13 : 26] And if we do that we do it to a great loss. So bless the Gospel. Pour out your spirit upon us as we look to yourself. To see a day of power.

And a day of blessing. That sinners would confess sin and turn from it to Christ. That true penitence would be the experience of all of us.

That we would acknowledge sin and seek forgiveness for it at your hand. And by the preaching of the word to that end. Bless all who proclaim on this day.

Hear our petitions. And grant cleansing from our sins. In Jesus the Redeemer's name we would ask it. Amen. We are going to hear God's word as we have it in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

And we are going to read chapter 5. Ephesians chapter 5. We are going to read the whole chapter. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children.

[14 : 33] And walk in love as Christ also has loved us. And has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God. For a sweet smelling savour. But fornication and all uncleanness and covetousness.

Let it not be once named amongst you. As becometh saints. Neither filthiness nor foolish talking. Nor jesting which are not convenient but rather giving of thanks.

For this ye know that no hoodmunkers nor unclean person nor covetous man who is an idolater. Hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no man deceive you with vain words. For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

For ye were sometimes darkness. But now are ye light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.

- [15 : 39] Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness but rather deplore them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.
- But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light. For whatsoever doth make manifest is light.
- Wherefore he saith awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead. And Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly. Not as fools but as wise.
- Redeeming the time because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise. But understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess.
- But be filled with the Spirit. Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.
- [16 : 45] Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.
- Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church. And he is the saviour of the body.
- Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ. So let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church.
- And gave himself for it. That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself. A glorious church.
- Not having spot or wrinkle. Or any such thing. But that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.
- [17 : 51] He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh. But nourisheth and cherishes it. Even as the Lord the church.
- For we are members of his body. Of his flesh and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother.
- And shall be joined unto his wife. And they too shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery. But I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular.
- So love his wife even as himself. And the wife. See that she reverence her husband. And so on.
- May the Lord add his blessing. To this reading of his word and to his name be the praise. I'm going to turn to look at the passage that we've just read there.
- [18 : 54] And our thoughts will be focused on the words of verse 25 and down to verse 27. Husbands love your wives.
- Even as Christ also loved the church. And gave himself for it. That he might sanctify and cleanse it. With the washing of water by the word.
- That he might present it to himself. A glorious church. Not having spot or wrinkle. Or any such thing. But that it should be holy. And without blemish.
- There is no doubting the fact that Paul frequently. Surprises the readers of his epistles. With the kind of statements that he makes.
- And the language that he uses. At the beginning of the chapter we read. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children.
- [19 : 58] And walk in love. As Christ also has loved us. Notwithstanding the fact that. Most modern translations.

Use the word imitators rather than followers. What he is expecting. The Christian to do seems impossible. That is not something trivial.

That he expects. The preacher James Montgomery Boyce. Puts it like this. The question may be. How is it possible. To imitate one who is infinitely above us.

The sovereign God of the universe. We are to love as he loved. As the chapter progresses. We have an analogy.

Which again invites us. To do the same. What Charles Hodge. The theologian calls. The Christian duty. Of mutual submission. He uses the example of Christ. And he speaks of the relationship.

[21 : 07] That exists between husband and wife. Parent and child. And master and servant. Now when we look at the passage. And very often when we. Reflect on what the passage is saying.

We tend to focus. Upon the practical implications. Of what these words say. For. What they say. To the believer. To the believer. In particular. Christ. Is our example. In these aries.

In these aries. ThatBI. And the saints. Now when we look at the passage. And very often when we. Reflect on what the passage. Is saying. We tend to focus.

Upon the practical implications. Of what these words say. For. What they say. To the believer. In particular. Christ.

example in these areas. Christ is the one who expects us to behave in a manner that he himself exemplifies. Recently I used the words of this passage in the context of our marriage service and there are without question elements to that that should be highlighted on such an occasion. However for the purpose of today's service I would like us to focus on the words of the passage with a view to discovering what is set before us as the example. First of all we are told that Christ loved the church. Secondly we can ask the question what are the implications of that love? We are told he gave himself for it. And thirdly what the love for the church results in.

[23 : 07] Again reading 26 that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word that he might present it to himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish. First of all then we are told Christ loved the church.

If we are at all familiar with the words of the Bible we might suggest that this is an understatement but if it is it must be said for a reason. If anyone knows that Jesus loves Paul does. Perhaps that's why he speaks of it so often.

The opening words of the epistle see the impression it has made on Paul. The very opening chapter we read there. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

the very opening words of the Bible. You could say Paul had in mind Saul of Tarshish in the words of the text.

For example if we read the next chapter we see there a description of of someone who has been redeemed. He's written this epistle to Christian believers, converts, those who have been taken from empty lives to a life of faith. And when Paul is writing this epistle he is doing so as someone who knows what it is to experience salvation. So when he begins chapter 2, you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in times past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience and so on. You could easily see Paul thinking of what he was like before. Although he knows that is what everybody was like before they came to faith.

[26 : 06] I walked, I along with you walked in this way. I along with you was under the power of darkness and so on.

Personally, Paul has come to know the riches of God's mercy in Christ Jesus. For his great love, he says, wherewith he loved us. Personally, Paul knows such a love. Theologically, he tries to understand it.

Jesus has told the church, greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Paul, the apostle, the preacher and teacher, the Christian believer knows personally the truth of the love as its focus. Writing in his letter to the church in Galatia, notice what he says.

I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[27 : 34] We could easily lose sight of the wonder that we should feel that Christ loved me if we are in awe of the fact that he died for one who confessed himself to be the chief of sinners.

We could think that Christ's love for Paul is of greater importance in comparison to the love that he has for us, because we see such a wonder in Christ loving the likes of Paul.

But we would be wrong. But we would be wrong. Because while it is appropriate to think of ourselves as individuals being loved by Christ, we must remember he died for the church.

He died for those that the Father gave to him, the elect of God. The late John McSween, preaching on these words, said, There are three persons in the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

This is the one who loved the church from all eternity with an everlasting love. He loved the church when she was dead in trespasses and sins, walking in the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, and was by nature the child of wrath, even as others.

[29 : 11] Sometimes we foolishly think of ourselves as being worthy recipients of the love of Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It seems impossible that God could love someone in eternity that was not yet created. Yet in the mind of the eternal that is what happened.

And just as surely the fact of the one loved being loved does not depend on the loveliness of the subject. There have been occasions when a person loved another until something was discovered about them and in their past or present circumstances on the love court.

God is never surprised by those he loves. He knows them intimately and he knew them even before the world was. And his love for them will not change.

He loves because of who he is, not because of who they are or what they are. God, we are told, commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[30 : 30] Second thing we can consider is what are the implications of that love? He loved the church and gave himself for it.

This love is described by some at least as spontaneous and self-sacrificing. We are told repeatedly within the scripture that when Jesus died on the cross, he died for others.

In the Roman place of these others. The apostle Paul never tires of telling others this. For there is one God and one mediated between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.

These few words contain within them what is of the utmost import for the salvation of sinners. Something that a great many have no notion of with regard to the nature of Christ's self-giving.

Dr. Kennedy Dingwall has these words for the reader. We must be careful not to dissociate the sacrifice from himself.

[31 : 42] And on the other hand, not to separate it in our thinking from what of all he went through in human nature. During all his course of obedience and suffering, till both were closed and crowned in the death of the cross.

And it is only when we connect both his passion with all its infinite dignity and blessedness.

And his work with all that implies of honour to the law and of satisfaction to justice. That we can rightly contemplate what was given by him when he gave himself for the church.

God loved the church in Christ Jesus and gave himself for it. We are told God so loved the church that he gave himself as a sacrifice to God.

As we are taught in the shorter Catechism, to satisfy divine justice. No more was expected, but less would not have sufficed.

[33 : 00] It is the doctrine of substitution. His gift to the sinner is, Let me take your curse from you, and so take away your condemnation, and I will stand in your place, die your death, answer for your sins.

As Principal MacLeod reminds us, Christ does not merely offer the sacrifice. He becomes the sacrifice.

He drinks the cup so that we should not drink it. He is cursed so that we should not be cursed. He is forsaken that we should not be forsaken. Condemned that we should not be condemned.

He gave himself, no less. And this self-giving was willful and willing. The foreign thinkers repeatedly emphasised the fact that he gave his soul a ransom for many.

When he entered into the experience of death, it was a doing on his part, an act of his giving. A quote from the older divine suggests that he sacrificed his humanity on the altar of his divinity.

[34 : 18] Something that requires careful contemplation. In the late Professor Finlayson's book, The Cross and the Experience of Our Lord, he writes, He laid himself upon the altar as the last offering.

And then with a loud voice, he cried, It is finished. Life did not ebb away. It was given. In full possession of all he ever had, he laid that all upon the altar, a whole burnt offering unto God.

He gave himself. He gave himself. Finally and briefly, the reason given, we find in verse 26 and verse 27.

When we read these words, what are we reminded of? We're reminded of what awaits the believer who finds life without end in Christ.

He gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

[35 : 43] The church for whom he gave himself needed to experience salvation, but it's salvation in all its fullness. Very many think that Jesus died to save people from the consequences of their sins, which is true as far as it goes.

But the Lord does not mean for those saved by him to go on in their sins. He wishes them to experience the cleansing of sanctification, the washing of water by the word.

There is a need for the guilt of sin to be dealt with, but so also the defilement that it has brought. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse from sin, and it can from all sin.

The ultimate end is in the day of glory Christ will have a glorious church, free from all the pollutions of this world, destined to be, as Paul says, conformed to his image.

The holy, harmless, undefiled one. Many wonder what it is going to be like to be like him.

[37 : 01] Whatever it involves, it involves all that is a consequence of what he has done in the giving of himself for his church.

We pray that we would be numbered amongst them who have found their salvation in him. May he bless to us these few thoughts.

Let us pray. O Lord, O God, we give thanks that you are the saviour of sinners and that when we look to you for salvation, if we put our trust in you, you have assured us that we will know that salvation and that there will be nothing lacking for any who put their faith in you.

Help us by supplying us with that grace of faith, be it ever so small, that it is sufficient to ensure that we will be found not only with them but like them.

So we pray for all who are yours today. Bless them, we pray, encourage them in their life of faith, keep them safe in this world that is full of danger. Add to their number, we pray, by pouring out your spirit upon us and directing each one to Christ, the one whom to know is life everlasting.

[38 : 26] Grant mercy for all our sinful shortcomings, and cleanse us in the Redeemer's name. Now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always.

Amen.