

The Message to the Church in Ephesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 October 2020

Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

[0 : 0 0] And together in the worship of God, we shall sing to his praise from Psalm 91.

Psalm 91. And from the beginning. He that earth in the secret place of the Most High reside, under the shade of him that is the Almighty shall abide.

I of the Lord my God will say he is my refuge still, he is my fortress and my God, and in him trust I will. Assuredly he shall thee save and give deliverance from subtle foulish snare and from the noisome pestilence.

His feather shall thee hide, thy trust under his wings shall be. His faithfulness shall be a shield and buckler unto thee. Thou shalt not need to be afraid for terrors of the night, nor for the arrow that doth fly by day while it is light, nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness secretly, nor for destruction that doth waste at noonday openly.

Let us sing these verses. Psalm 91. From the beginning to verse 6. See that earth in the secret place of the Most High reside.

[1 : 3 3] He that earth in the secret place of the Most High reside, under the shade of the Most High reside, the Most High reside, the Most High reside, the Most High reside.

I am the Lord, my God will sing, He is my blessing, He is my fortress, He is my fortress, He is my fortress, My God will live in the past thy will.

A children in the past thy will be saved, And here in the past thy will be saved, the Most High reside, He is my fortress, He is my fortress, His strength shall be high, my trust of the Most High reside, For the Most High reside, And here in the past thy will be saved, He is my fortress, The Most High reside, The blood is with shall be, His faithfulness shall be, The shield and the glory unto thee.

Though shalt thou need to be afraid, For shall we show of the night, Nor for the arrow, Thou not cry my thee, While it is high.

Not for the best of lengths, And walks in thine, And his secret be, Not for the best of lengths, And the grace, And who may open thee.

[4 : 4 5] Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray. O gracious God, We give thanks that you are that God of whom the psalmist spoke from his own experience.

Someone who could hide him in the time of trouble. He was able to think of you, his God, as someone who was ready to relieve him from the burden of being the prey of his enemies.

We give thanks that your word often directs us, So that our thoughts contemplate such a God.

Sometimes reminding us of our own experience, Sometimes directing us to the experience of others, So that we know where to go, So that we understand who it is that has revealed himself to us as that God of all grace.

We bring before you our cares and concerns at this time, Thankful that whatever our burden may be, we can leave it with you.

[6 : 29] Something that we are at times reluctant to do. As we have read on occasion of some who carried their burden into the presence of God, And rather than leaving it with you, He carried it away with them again.

And willing to trust, And willing to surrender themselves to the grace of the God who knows all things.

Sometimes you allow us to suffer in this world. Sometimes you allow us to experience what it is to be downcast, And to be filled full of the uncertainties that this world brings our way.

Without light upon our situation. Without a guiding star to lead us.

We acknowledge as the children of Israel of old, That they were privileged in knowing you as their compass.

[8 : 03] One who would go before them as the breaker up of their way. One who would be there to direct them in the path of life.

As a pillar of fire by night, a pillar of cloud by day. And how often did they take their eye off you.

And how often did they surrender themselves to their own wanton lusts. And allow them to take over. And to lead them out to the path of obedience.

We are difficult to learn. We are difficult to teach. But give us these teachable spirits. We pray that you would remember us.

As a praying people. Remembering your people here in this world. The congregations that pay your name. We pray for them as congregations.

[9 : 04] We pray for them as members. And adherents of these congregations. We pray for them as homes and families that make up these congregations.

We give thanks for the Presbytery. And the Presbyteries of our denomination. We pray that you would bless them. Even as they are led to be.

To be believers in. In the. Guiding principles of Presbyterianism. As a biblical.

Mandate upon which they build. And we give thanks. That you are the one who directs us. So to do.

We pray that you would remember all the congregations of our denomination. Within our island. Within our nation. And beyond the corners. Of our own.

[10 : 04] United Kingdom. To far flung places. Where there are. Congregations associated with us. And some that are unknown to us. That have your people there.

And we pray for you. To have your people there. We pray for them. In this time of necessity. Where they are. Emptied of themselves.

And. Cause to look. With their eyes to the heavens. And we pray that this would be true of each of us. That we would be collectively. Recognized as those who are.

Willing to commit themselves to. This God of all grace. That you may bless us. Abundantly far above our asking. We are conscious of this.

Pandemic that is raging. That has affected so many lives. Hitherto and. At the present. And perhaps way into the future. We pray for.

[11 : 04] Grace to bring one another's burdens. Into the good presence. That you would heal those who are sick. That you would remember those who are still recovering. That you would. That you would.

Be mindful of those who have. Grievs. Arising out of those who have succumbed. To the virus. Remember those who are. Responsible for their care. Doctors and nurses and. All who are instrumental in delivering such care.

Within the hospital. In the community. In homes. In homes. I pray for those who are. Ministering to loved ones in their own home. Those who are. In those who are. In those who. In those who are.

In those who are. Who are. In those who have. In those who have succumbed. In those who have succumbed. To the virus. Remember those who are. Responsible for their care.

Doctors and nurses and. to loved ones in their own home, those who are in isolation, those who are in quarantine, those who are indifferent to the needs of others and careless about their own.

[12 : 05] We bring them before you and ask for your grace to be made manifest in their lives, that they may know the foolishness that is in man's heart.

We bring before you the cares and the concerns that are prevalent in every generation, that may be forgotten at the present, those who are suffering from various illnesses, from cancer, from heart failure, from mental illness, from all kinds of physical or mental disease that affects us all from time to time.

May we not neglect the need that we have to bring our cares and concerns to the one who is the great physician, especially the one who is able to minister to our souls.

So pour out your spirit upon us, we pray, remembering all that is done in your name throughout this day, the proclamation of your word, those who preach in public, those who preach through the medium of television, Lord, through radio, wherever the opportunity arises, we pray, that you would remember all who are given this opportunity.

Continue with us, we pray, watching over our homes and our families, pouring out your spirit upon us as the one who is the God and Father of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

[13 : 55] We give thanks for him, for his life, for his death, for his ongoing intercession. We give thanks for the beauty of his character, for his willingness to be obedient even unto death.

We pray that you would pour out your spirit upon us in his name. Hear us and pardon us in Jesus.

Amen. We're going to hear from the New Testament Scriptures, the book of the Revelation, and we're reading from chapter 1 into the opening verses of chapter 2.

We'll read from verse 9 of chapter 1. I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.

[15 : 22] And what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrda, and unto Pergamos, and unto Theatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me, and being turned I saw seven golden candlesticks. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one likened to the Son of Man, clothed with her garment down to the foot, and girted about the paps with her golden girdle, his head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, and his voice is the sound of many waters.

And he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet, as dead, and he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not.

I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And have the keys of hell and of death.

[17 : 04] Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars, which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks, the seven stars, are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest, are the seven churches.

And to the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

I know thy works, and thy labour and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil, and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars, and hast borne and hast patience, for my name's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

[18 : 50] To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. And so on.

May the Lord at this blessing, to this reading of his word, unto his name, be the praise. I would like us just for a short while to consider the words that we have at the beginning of chapter 2 there, unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write.

These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. When we read this book of the Revelation, there are passages within it that we might find difficult to understand because of the nature of the book.

That is, describing scenes that are not of this world. But there are other things that are spoken of that are recognisable.

And whatever we make of the book as a whole, we read there that the author says, Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.

[20 : 35] For, he says, the time is at hand. The author we know is John, the beloved disciple. He writes from the island of Patmos.

And the book itself is listed amongst apocalyptic writings, such as Daniel or Ezekiel or Zechariah. Revelation comes at the beginning of the book.

The apocalypse of Jesus Christ. The revelation of Jesus Christ. So there is prophecy within it.

It is also, to a degree, historical. It is filled full of symbolism, which we find difficult to interpret.

The section of the book that the first part of chapter 2 comes from, is a section where John, is the voice of Christ, tells them to, write to the seven churches in Asia.

[22 : 07] Tradition claims that John was the overseer of each one of these churches. And through him, Christ was going to communicate to them.

However, the fact that seven churches are named, it may make us think that what we have here is a message to the church.

throughout this book, there are various times in which the number seven appears, or the number three, or the number five.

Numbers that are often used to speak of a particular perfection. and God is, through John, speaking to the church in the guise of these seven churches who are in Asia.

There are probably many more churches in Asia than the seven, but they are often thought to represent the completeness or the totality of the church.

[23 : 33] William Hendrickson, for example, suggests that each individual church is a type and not indicating one definite period in history, but describing conditions which are constantly repeated in the actual life of various congregations, which is borne out by the refrain at the end of each letter.

We find, as we read through each one of these messages to individual churches, that there are things to commend and there are things to condemn.

strengths and weaknesses are highlighted and noted for the benefit of other churches. This letter that we're looking at today is the first letter to the church in Ephesus and the main accusation is that this church is experiencing love that has gone cold.

Some have entitled it the loveless church. We can work our way through each one of these verses and see what they bring to our attention worth noting.

First of all we have a description given to us of Christ unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

[25 : 30] stars are understood to mean ministers or pastors and the lampstands mean the churches.

So what is being alluded to is that Christ is present always in his church and his ministers operate under his direction.

His knowledge of them is intimate and perfect. He knows them and he knows the church that they serve.

And sometimes when we think of Christ we think of him as being remote from us. We think of him in heaven but his interest in his church here on earth is not of someone who is in a far-flung country but someone who is ever present.

and the way he is described here reminds us of his omniscience of that perfect knowledge which belongs to one who has an interest a perfect interest in his own people.

[26 : 49] The second thing we can notice is the description of the ministers and the church. stars and lamps what we know to display light and produce light in the dark.

It's an image that's not difficult for us to interpret. They are light bearers light it is their function not to radiate their own light but to radiate the light of another.

Christ says to them you are the light of the world because he himself is the light and as he is the light they are light as they speak of him and display the life that he has in their life.

The way that he works through them in order to speak to his people wherever they are found whatever time whatever place whatever situation they find themselves in.

John the apostle these things saith he that holdeth his seven stars in his right hand who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlestick.

[28 : 30] There are clear words of commendation thirdly I know thy works he says and thy labour and thy patience and how you cannot bear them which are evil and how you have tried them which say they are apostles and are not and has found them liars.

it seems that it wasn't an easy thing to be a Christian in Ephesus it was a vast city at the time a very rich city a very busy cosmopolitan city a place that was guilty of idolatrous practices in connection with the epistle the mention is made of one of the first martyrs and what brought him to suffer death was how the Roman emperor of the time laid claim to deity and even though they gave perfect freedom to the citizens to worship whatever god they chose and there were thousands of them they were not allowed to embrace one god before the emperor and this christian refused to do it and he was put to death because of that like many others before and after him people make out that they are liberal that they allow people to have as much liberty as they choose to exercise until that liberty causes them to correct them or disabuse them of what they believe in if it is error here the most famous shrine was to the goddess

Diana but the church existed in that atmosphere and he commenced their labour and their hard work in the name of Christ their diligence as they persevered in the face of such darkness from what is said it was a work that was severely tested and he mentions their patience and perseverance words that are often associated with trial or resistance to error not only that they contend for the truth and resist those who are liars and false apostles again that is not the popular road to take as I previously said when you fly in the face of popular opinion it doesn't take long to discover how ready those who hold these opinions are to turn on you on you on you accept every doctrine or every preacher and they had discernment that allowed them to know what was right and what was wrong and that is important for us to remember as well that discernment is something that every

Christian should possess based on the truth and everything should be taken to the touchstone of truth before we embrace it shouldn't swallow every doctrine or every word that we hear whoever comes with it if we are diligent as Christians we should take all the theology that we hear to the word of God however there's commendation and there is condemnation in verse four nevertheless he says I have somewhat against thee because you have left your first love I wonder what he meant who was this first love if it is something that they are commended for then surely you would think that as a commendation it would be love for Christ if it is a condemnation there is a failure in that respect and that is exactly what it is their first love should have been

Christ first by way of preeminence first in the sense that no one has ever been loved like they are because they have been loved by him so if you go to the Psalms I love the Lord because my voice and prayer he did hear go to the Song of Solomon and you listen to the sighs and the pleas of one looking for a lost love Charles Spurgeon quotes Samuel Rutherford and Rutherford someone who has written many letters which are dripping with the love that he had for Christ and he says in one of these writings though there were but a broad hell between me and Christ and

[35 : 21] I could not get to Christ but by wading through it I would gladly do so in order to be in his arms and that is the kind of love of which the apostle speaks and yet it is a love that has gone cold it was once hot but it is no longer hot how can this happen how does it come about what is the reason for it and sometimes when you talk about the experience of lovelessness on the part of a Christian it is not that they did not have that love before but that they have succumbed to a situation where they have been drawn away from that love so that their interest their affection their time whatever is drawn to that sometimes it may happen almost imperceptibly it's a subtle change some say the change here is against the charge here is against a church who remained orthodox in that sense the change wasn't there perceptively they remained orthodox outwardly conforming to the norms but gradually becoming legalistic and loveless what was previously done out of love for

Christ was now done with no thought of Christ sometimes you can succumb to such a form of Christianity what we do or what we used to do because we burned with that seal for him wanting to do our utmost wanting to do our best for him but now we do it because it's what's expected of us and even then it's a reluctant activity you you can outwardly conform to the things that are expected of you but do it in a loveless way and this is a serious thing you look at the warning when the

John records these words he says remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of its place except thou repent removing the candlestick out of its place examine where you have gone wrong and put it right when you look at these churches of the New Testament all that's left of them are remnants today Ephesus is a ruin but he still concludes with a word of commendation they hate the heretics who make sinful idolatrous practice with their brand of

Christianity there is a final word of promise given to them as well they are to take on board what God can do he that has an ear let him hear what the spirit saith unto him unto the churches to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God a word of promise a personal word be attentive apply the truth to yourself triumph gain the victory over these things and you will receive your reward an image of the garden of Eden and restored fellowship the church is a fragile thing the human soul is a vulnerable thing temptations are many and the

Christian who lives in this world will encounter all kinds sometimes subtle sometimes faecal sometimes what happens happens almost without us realizing it and the coldness that overtook Ephesus was not something that came overnight it was something that happened over a period of time but it is not something that's irreversible it's not something that can't be restored it's not something that can't be dealt with and every one of us can surely enjoy the warmth and the intimacy of the fellowship of Christ more than we do may God grant to us that desire to have that that we may enjoy the privileges of the overcomer to eat of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God to partake of the fruits that are there for us according his mercy direct us to the

[42 : 06] Christ of all grace let us pray Lord help us to understand that we can live our lives here in the world as loveless Christians the two things seem polar opposites but the coldness that can easily overtake us is there for all to see and we pray that each one of us would consider where we are with the Lord and seek that which will enable us to burn brightly for a moment on his behalf in the world hear our prayers and petitions guard us from the dangers that are ever prevalent in the world we pray for all these things with mercy in Christ cleansing from all sin and now may grace mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy

Spirit be with you all now and always Amen