## PM Acts 2:42-47

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Date: 27 December 2020

Preacher: Rev Douglas Cranston

[0:00] Friends, the observations are exactly the same as this morning. My colleague Robert Dale will preach, God willing, no sorry, in the midweek at 7 o'clock on Wednesday.

Again, very thankful for the great encouragement that two trusts have responded to applications for grants to do with the eradication of dry rot, the sum of £10,000 has been promised towards the estimates of £21,000.

And the Deacons Court, having thought about it, have decided that it would be appropriate for the congregation to be given an opportunity to make donations towards the cost of that work.

If you're so minded, please put any gifts in the collection box in an envelope marked for the Fabric Fund. Again, we give thanks to God for raising up David, Jonathan and William, who have been considered and elected as suitable elders for the congregation.

The Kirk Sessions' next meeting is mid-January, and following that meeting, God willing, arrangements for the ordination will be intimated. David Parker is going to be preaching, God willing, next Lord's Day at the usual times of 11 and 6.

[1:34] Let's just pray together. Father, our only desire this night, as we gather here in this evening hour, is to give you the glory, the honour and praise that you alone are due.

And to raise up high the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sure and certain promise, that you will not render that declaration of Christ the Saviour and Lord void, at the end of the day.

So we, Father, peacefully, worshipfully open our lives to your Holy Spirit, working in them, leading, prompting, challenging, and encouraging us to the glory of God, to the building up of his church, and to the advancement of his kingdom.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now we're going to sing Psalm 46, the first five verses.

William, can you tell us, are we singing from Sing Psalms, or from the Scottish Psalter? Scottish Psalter. Scottish Psalter, number 46, verses 1 to 5, to God's praise.

[3:13] God is our Lord, who can us pray, He saves our present day, therefore, though the earth we will, we will not be afraid.

Though hills and hills that seas the earth, the waters roaring way, and trouble be able, the hills of the valley seas to shake, A river entered stream to write

HALING CI Art National Council As rightly prove William's going to lead us in prayer.

Thank you, brother. O Lord, we can say with the psalmist, you are our refuge and our strength.

Lord, you are the solid rock, that firm foundation upon which all of your true saints' lives are built. Lord, we thank you for the fact that as we look around us in this world, there is no safety, there is no security, no real joy, no real peace.

But Lord, we thank you that in Christ there is joy unspeakable and there is peace that passes all understanding. Lord, in our nature, we know we are dead in sin and trespasses.

Lord, we would never, ever go seeking after you. But we thank you for your electing grace. We thank you that while we were yet dead in sins and trespasses, you called us by your Holy Spirit with our irresistible call to repentance and faith.

Lord, we thank you for our faithful saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for his incarnation and his perfect life of obedience, his death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension and his, to your right hand and their interceding for us.

Lord, we thank you that in his own body he paid the sin debt that we could not pay. He paid the penalty, the price that we deserve, that wrath that should have fallen on us fell on him.

Lord, we thank you that through faith in Christ his perfect obedience can be credited to our own account and that as we stand before you now and in the judgment day we are not clothed in any righteousness of our own but only in the pure righteous robes of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7:33] Lord, we ask that you would bless us this hour and help us to pay attention to your word as Douglas preaches to us. Please open the eyes of our understanding to truly get a grasp of your scriptures and to leave this place knowing how to love you more, knowing how to glorify you more and being so much more thankful for the salvation we have in Christ.

So we commit this time to you now in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, sir. Turn with me in the New Testament. As I said this morning, I just want to try and gather our thoughts at the end of this year in what I hope is a helpful and a challenging way.

I'm probably not going to preach for as long as I normally do, which my wife often tells me is too long rather than a specific period of time.

No, she doesn't do that, but it often is that. But I just want to try and gather a few thoughts that are kind of running about in my mind about how to take this last Sunday of the new year.

Let's begin in chapter 2, verse 41. And this is the Word of God. So those who received his word were baptized and they were added that day about 3,000 souls.

[9:15] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And all came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. And then, just further on in chapter 5 and just the final verse, the apostles had been arrested under the first pangs of prosecution and persecution by the authorities of the church.

[10:43] But again, we have this emphasized for us and reiterated for us in verse 42. And every day in the temple and from house to house they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Amen. And may God bless to us this reading of his holy word and to his name be praise and glory given. We're going to sing Psalm 130 and we're going to sing it out of Sing Psalms.

Sing Psalms. Thank you. Sing Psalms.

I give attention to my voice when I fall mercy night.

I give attention to my son, if you are still dreaming hard.

[12:17] I give attention to my son, if you are still dreaming hard.

I give my soul, praise for the Lord.

My hope is in His Word. O'er the cross, my grace for God.

My soul, praise for the Lord. O Israel, your hope in God.

For mercy is within. And who redemption, rodlessness, His people give me.

[13:57] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, what we know not teach us. What we have not give us.

And what we are not make us. May your Word speak to us, O Lord. Show us yourself, show us ourself.

Show us the Saviour. And may your Word speak to us, O Lord. Amen. I've always been a very keen student of history.

History, it teaches us so much. And I think in many ways it is true that the history that we forget is the history that we're condemned to relive.

I was doing some history reading. And I discovered something that I, if I did know it, I had forgotten it.

[15:06] I probably didn't know it. But it was to do with the establishing of the National Health Service and the welfare estate.

And what I think was significant to me as I was reading about this is that I discovered that it was in 1942.

And those dates are of course significant because it's right in the middle of the Second World War. In 1942, a gentleman called William Beveridge.

I think he may have been an accountant. I don't think he was a politician. He may have been. But William Beveridge wrote what was called the Beveridge Report.

And in that report, he set out the principles and the costings and the projections for the establishing of the National Health Service.

That of course, just for completion, was established under Adley's government when Bevan was appointed the Minister of Health. And he took forward the recommendations and the costings of the Beveridge Report and thus established the NHS.

So why that story is not just to prepare you for the New Year quiz. What I thought was significant about that was that in what were really the darkest days of the Second World War, when really in the middle of the war, it looked as if Germany was on the ascendancy, that Germany was prevailing.

We were almost at that stage, at a stage where the United Kingdom, Great Britain, was almost now standing alone against the Nazi ideology and the Nazi forces in Germany.

And despite that, despite that, there were men and women who were making careful preparation for the future.

And for a better future. And for a future where the NHS service, as we enjoy it today, some say the envy of the world, whether that's true or not doesn't really matter.

[17:46] But something of great value and significance was being planned for in days where it was probably a wild hope and a wild dream that these things would ever be established.

And I thought that that was a worthwhile thought to, a peg if you like, to latch on to these thoughts.

Because there are more thoughts than what you would call a traditional sermon at the end of the year. Now, as we contemplate these things, it's important that what I do here is not simply my own speculation or either any kind of experience that I may have grasped, but it's anchored in Scripture.

And I've always said to my people that the main things are the plain things in Scripture. And that passage in Acts is a good reminder, not of anything new, but what we must never forget.

Because it sets out for us key basic principles that we should constantly remind ourselves of because we should never forget them.

[19:17] As I was preparing for this, again, I did some historical research and I discovered that on Monday, March 18th, 1861, in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, one of the most significant ministries in the life of the Church began in London.

It was, of course, when Spurgeon was appointed to be the minister of that congregation and he exercised what is by all accounts a most astonishing ministry for nearly 30 years.

An average of 6,000 people attended his services and his printed sermons every week were read by millions of people.

Such was the demand to hear this man preach on Sunday mornings that a series of morning services began at 7 a.m. in the morning.

And such was the demands that were made on Spurgeon that he would tell you that he very seldom ever knew what happened on a Monday.

that after having preached four or five and sometimes six times, depending on the sizes of congregations and time of the year, Spurgeon would go to his bed on Sunday evening and would sleep almost constantly through the whole of Monday.

Not out of laziness, but out of pure exhaustion for having preached the Word of God on those things. But I was reading about that and what he said on that first Sunday was this, I propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the presence and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So as we come to the end of a year, if we have to, we should be making sure that our dial is set in one direction.

And that that one direction is to know nothing among us except Christ and Him crucified and risen, that He is the Savior.

And that it should always be our first question in any process of decision making that we are making is, will this honour the Savior?

[ 22:17 ] Will this point to the Savior? Will this make the Savior more clear as to who He is to those who do not know Him?

And if the Savior is going to be acknowledged and honoured and upheld and have that place within any fellowship, that fellowship needs to be led and needs to be made up of members who love the Savior.

and once we depart from that, we will quickly find ourselves in big trouble because priorities will be diverted, resources will be diverted.

And we will find ourselves in a place where very quickly, it is hard to find the Savior. Far less for Him to be the sole focus of everything that we seek to do.

Now did you notice that when we read that passage in Acts 2, verse 41, so those who received His word were baptised and they were added that day about 3,000 souls.

[23:39] One of the foundation biblical principles were that the saved were added and the added were saved. The saved were added and the added were saved.

The saved were added to the church. We have a lot, and particularly of lower generations, who seem to take the view that it's not that important that they join or commit themselves to a fellowship.

And I know and I understand why that is, why young people don't want to be joining. We're not joiners. This is not a joining generation.

People don't like joining. That's why many of us here, probably a lot of us here, will remember days when there were boys' brigades and when there were girls' brigades and when there were all kinds of scout movements and all that.

My own father at one time was minister in Fernhill and Cathcan Church. And at one point in his company section, now we're talking, we're not talking about the junior BB, we're not talking about the rockets or the pre-junior BB, we're just talking about the company section of boys, numbered 500 boys in the company section of the BB.

Now, we're only talking there 60 years ago. I would think you'd be lucky if there were 600 BB boys in the whole of the Glasgow Battalion now.

And in one church, there were 500 members of the boys' brigade. So I understand that in many ways we've moved on there.

But it is an absolute biblical mandate that when we become converted, that the Bible instructs us to join together with other believers in a way that is not casual, in a way that involves commitment.

When we get saved, it is a biblical responsibility to associate with a church. But here's the other side of that.

And this is the side that in days when our numbers are diminishing, when things are not looking good, similar to the situation that I envisaged during the middle of the Second World War.

[26:17] What should we be doing? We should be planning, we should be preparing, but we should do so in a way that is always corrected by the Bible. And one of the great errors of the church, and particularly the Church of Scotland in our nation over the last 50 years, was that it added people to the membership of the church that time has shown very clearly were not truly converted men and women.

Those who were saved were added and those who added were saved. And there was no sense in which we would ever vary from that priority.

So we are called to join if we are saved, and we are called to make sure with every rigor that those who join are converted people.

The second thing I think is a good corrective for us, and again, something that we should be thinking and considering as we pray and prepare and believe about what might happen in the future is that although we are in a day of very small things, although we are diminished, our God is still in control, and that God demands our worship.

He demands our worship, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, if they centre around anything, they centre around the worship of God.

[28:12] When the chosen people of God were in their greatest sin, it was because they had neglected the worship of the one and true living God.

John 4, 23 and 24 says this, The time is coming and is already here when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as He really is, offering Him the true worship that He wants.

God is Spirit, and only by the power of His Spirit can people worship Him as He really is. So going back to this morning, when the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in our life, its essential work is first to convince us that the Gospel is true, to convince us that the Bible is true, but its essential work is to make us into worshippers.

Because, as I said a few weeks ago, that is how we were made. We were made essentially as worshippers. and the chief end of man is to enjoy God and glory in God.

We are to lift up our hearts in praise and adoration, in reverence, in obedience, in thankfulness, and in awe of God.

[29:38] We are essentially called to reconfigure our thoughts so that our whole dependence as the church of Jesus Christ is on God.

And God will build. And He will build according to His will and His purpose. And as we, like Bevan and those people who prepared right in the middle of the darkest hour, so we too should be preparing for what might lie ahead.

And the whole point of worship and prayer, they devoted themselves to the Word of God, to the Apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

And prayer is ever increasingly shown to us in the Bible in many, many places that prayer is about aligning ourselves with the will of God.

Being content in His will. Trusting in His will and in His promise. And so we need again to realign our thinking and the call that is on our lives to live by promise and not by circumstances.

to live by the promises of God and not by the circumstances that prevail in this day and age. And again, that is a useful corrective for the world because so many people have abandoned that first notion that we live by promise and what they have done is they have said, let's look at the world, let's look at the circumstances we find ourselves in, let's draw the conclusion that somehow the old ways are not working and let's try and adopt the ways of the world and once we adopt the ways of the world, then the people of the world will find us attractive and will come in.

We don't want people coming in. That's the initial corrective. That those who join the church should be the saved.

Yes, we want to engage in evangelism. Yes, we want to reach a lost world. But in order to do that, what God wants us to do is to pray and to trust and to have confidence that God's methods are still the best methods.

They should still be the church's methods and those methods are nailed into our lives and then grafted into us through the process of worship.

worship. Where like that early church, there is a devotion to the word of God, to teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

[ 32:57 ] We are called to worship. Secondly, you cannot read the end parts of the gospel and you cannot read the Acts of the Apostles and indeed many of the epistles without realizing that not only are we called to worship, we are committed and commissioned to witness.

Christianity from the very first days was never meant to be some localized parochial faith. faith. It's supposed to be a world faith.

Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all mankind. The command, the commission and the content.

government. We are commanded to go. We are commissioned to go and we're told what we have to go with. That it is the gospel.

And much of what has gone wrong in the church in Scotland in the last 20 or 30 years is that we have fewer and fewer people standing in our pulpits who actually had confidence in the gospel.

[ 34:21 ] who actually believed that if the gospel is simply, clearly and straightforwardly laid before men and women, it will always accomplish one thing, exactly what a sovereign God means to accomplish by its proclamation.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Go back to what I said a few weeks ago. What are the marks when I was dealing with a woman at the well? What are the marks of a converted person? Lots of answers to that, but two are important.

We will be different from the people that we once were. And two, that difference will make such a significance to our lives. it will make such a transforming significance in our lives that we will want other people to know and to hear the gospel and the good news.

And you see, those first two points are linked. We are called to worship, we are commissioned to witness. The proclamation of the gospel flows out of our worship of God.

[ 35:50 ] And while it is important that what we do on a Sunday morning is always evangelistic, I firmly believe with all my heart that is not the sole purpose or even the primary purpose of Sunday morning worship worship, or for that matter Sunday evening worship.

I believe that worship of God's people should be about the building up of the saints, teaching them, instructing them, equipping them to then go and do the work of evangelism, to then go and be salt and light.

And that is the purpose. Bill Hybels, many of you will know, establishes the Seeker Friendly Church. There is a lot that Bill Hybels said and did that was good.

He has fallen from grace a wee bit and there is certainly accusations around in terms of his conduct. I don't know whether they are true or false, but credit to the man.

He did a lot of things that were good. But what he didn't do that was good is he established the notion that somehow our churches should be Seeker Friendly.

[ 37:17 ] And the main premise of that church is that people who do not know Christ should come into our church and they should feel comfortable, welcome and at home.

I defy you to find any understanding of a true New Testament church that thought those who did not have Christ the Saviour and Lord should in any way come into their midst and feel comfortable.

In fact, it is true that when we truly come under the systematic preaching of God's Word, even if we are converted men and women, there are many times when we should leave this place feeling downright uncomfortable.

Far less those who come in here with the sinner's worry. We are called to worship, we are committed to witness, and thirdly, we are challenged to grow.

Those opening verses, those final verses rather of chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles, clearly has seen the evidence of that growth. God building His church.

[38:35] Those who received His Word were baptized and they were added that day about 3,000 souls. And day after day, verse 46, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. So the challenge is to be a growing church.

But there is a nuance there as well. It's not just about the church growing in numbers, but about the membership of that church growing and maturing.

growing. That's what Peter says in 2 Peter 3, 18. Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must seek to present every man mature in Christ.

We must grow up in every way to Christ who is the head. And that you see, is one of the principal duties of anyone who will stand in this pulpit is to help you grow, develop, mature, in an understanding of your own faith, in an understanding of your own responsibility, in an understanding of God and His grace and His gospel.

[40:12] I have sat for too many years listening to unconverted people who were put into positions of leadership and responsibility that they should never have been anywhere near telling me about all the experience that they've had.

I've been an elder for 40 years or I've been an elder for 30 years or I've been that. And the truth is that the experience of many of these people was that they had been there for 40 years but they had one year's experience 40 times over.

They had never grown and developed and matured in a Christian understanding of anything. They had rested on their laurels.

They had sought to live by worldly wisdom. They had seen no importance to grow in the faith. And we are clearly challenged to grow.

The fourth thing I noted down here is that we are compelled to serve. Paul said in Romans 12, to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us.

[41:44] If our gift is to speak God's message, we do it according to the faith we have. If it is to serve, we should serve. If it is to teach, we should teach.

If it is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously. Whoever has authority should work hard. Whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully.

Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another warmly as Christian brothers and be eager to show respect for one another.

Back to our passage that we are hooking this on tonight. They were selling the possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

That's a verse that needs to be very carefully handled and has been grossly misused by many in the church today. But the whole testimony of scripture is clear.

[42:49] That we have a responsibility as Christians to be generous and to be warm hearted. And not simply to our own, but to our world.

To be generous, to be kind, to be warm, to be caring, to be servants of the world.

I remember one of the early focuses that I brought to my congregation in Kilmer Cove was that I wanted them to have a vision for world evangelism that went way beyond sending Christmas presents or cards to our missionary partners.

And over many, many years we managed to develop a care and a concern that was very practical and real. We brought people from projects that we were involved in.

But one of the most disturbing experiences I ever had was that our congregation along with another group in Glasgow had decided that we were going to put in a dental surgery into a church in Romania where many of the children who were orphans and who ran in the streets could go there for dental care.

[ 44:21 ] And three or four of us from the church along with three or four people from the other organization that we were involved in went along and we put in a dentist chair and our church managed to get a couple of dentists to go out there and to bring out supplies and do dental care for these children that had never had medical care.

And about three years after that project had established, I got a letter from the parent organization who had set this up in partnership with us that their council had reached a decision that they were only going to offer dental care to the children who had made a commitment to Christ.

And I can remember the day I opened that letter, and it was a letter in those days, and seldom, seldom have I been as furious and as upset with a group of people who were supposedly Christians, and probably were, to have so misunderstood the gospel.

To suggest that the Christian church should in any way discriminate against offering any kind of service or aid or help to people on the basis that some were Christians and some weren't.

How simple it would be to destroy that argument by just looking at the Lord himself, and how he touched people and moved people, and many of those people never, as far as we know, came to saving faith.

[46:16] We are compelled, to serve, compelled to be generous and warm serving a church. And along with that, we are commanded to care.

Do we truly care for the lost? Do we truly care for each other? No. one of the areas of devotion is that they devoted themselves in verse 42 to the fellowship.

Are we devoted to one another? Are we devoted to knowing and understanding and in the purest sense of the world, developing a godly intimacy with each other?

Such that our fellowship and our gathering together on a Sunday doesn't just become what I call clickety-click Christianity, where we get into that, but how are you doing?

I'm doing fine. And you could go all around the church, and I had a busy church in Kilmercombe, and I was standing at How You Do, everybody was fine in my church.

[47:35] Everybody was fine. All our marriages were fine, all our concerns were fine, all our cares about our children, everybody was fine. The truth was everybody wasn't fine.

And when we care for one another, we develop a passion for each other, where we can say, no, everything's not fine.

Whether that be in your own personal life and devotions, your own relationship with God, whether it be concerns about family, concerns about friends, we care.

An attitude of agape, caring, love. And finally, and with this I finish because it's not something I've ever really given a lot of emphasis to in ministry, but it's there, and therefore it's important that we say it.

We should also be committed to give. each one should give as he has decided, not with regret or out of any sense of duty, for God loves one who gives gladly.

[48:59] And God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause. What was it Malachi said way back in those days?

Open the windows of heaven, and poured out on us in abundance all kinds of good things. Our God is a lot of things, but you cannot possibly read the Bible and not conclude that he's generous, that he's a giver.

Jesus Christ is a lot of things, but you could not read the Gospels and not conclude that he's generous with his time and his care and his love and his concern.

And with everything that he gave, he gave unto death, even death on the cross. But let me caution here, because giving must always be discerning giving.

that's why I put it last on my list. Because without the checks of the first four or five things, without giving done in the context of worship, without giving done with a priority focus on witness, without giving done with an expectation that that money might be used to grow the church and not just sustain the church, not just maintain the church.

Giving that doesn't produce a church of service. Again, my congregation used to be, it was a very wealthy congregation. I used to say to them often that we don't have a financial problem, the only problem we have is that the finances are in your pocket and not in the offering plate.

we're compelled to serve, giving that is a response and an enabling of true service and care.

Giving that has been inspired by worship and by a church that has a desire to witness and serve and care.

life. And then once we do all these things, it's important to realize that when God saved us, he didn't establish a whole lot of other gods.

And I'm so grateful for that. When God saved us, he saved ordinary human beings like you and me. with all our foibles, with all our faults, with all our failings, with all our nuances and everything that makes us the kind of people that we are.

[52:06] He didn't turn us into many gods. He left us as saved people. And he wants us to worship him, to witness, to grow, to serve, to care, to give.

And one of the most important things that I think I can ever say to you at the end of this year is that we just need to focus on doing what we are called to do.

And then trust, hope, and pray, and wait for God to do the stuff that he's promised to do.

perhaps that should be our prayer as we reflect back on the year gone and as we try to refocus our priorities on what is to come.

Let's pray. Father, this will be our last moments in church at the end of this year and we would want to approach you with a sense of deep gratitude and thanksgiving that we have come through another year, a very difficult and testing year.

[53:34] you have brought us here safe and secure in your providence. hearts that overflow with gratitude.

And overflow with thanksgiving. that are moved by the safety and surety and security that we have in you.

and our prayer for our lives, for our witness, for our fellowship together is that for the years that lie ahead, that our focus will be the Lord Jesus Christ Christ and him lifted up to the glory of God, to the building up of this church and the church.

And we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen. Across each continent and island as dawn leads on another day, the voice of prayer is never silent, nor fades the sound of praise away.

So be it, Lord, your throne shall never, like earth's proud empires, pass away. Your kingdom stands and grows forever, till all the world your rule obey.

[55:23] We're going to end this service and this year with the hymn The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, is Ended. The day of bringing cold s' Sing me, O the holy physical's standing, I pray shall site to dark our rest, I bring Theus thy her customers sing while the ivory is tonight.

Through all the blood I've watched, And blessed, O God, I take all night.

The sun and Jesus rest is waking on heaven In the western sky.

And I am a freshness of me, My God, the sweetest God of mine.

So we make the love of my God, Now ever, my love was from heaven, And lost from us away.

[57:37] I give in the sun and the clouds forever, Till all my believers, And lost from us away.

If you can friends, let's stand. Father, we stand before you this night, And at the end of this year and this day, And our prayer is that the blessing of God Almighty, The one true living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Will be with us this night, And forever more.

Amen. Alright. Very good. This day will be alright.

To empty, And to empty that All that persecution has written Thank you.