

I and You - Communion Preparatory service

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Date: 01 September 2023

Preacher: Rev Thomas Davis

- [0 : 0 0] We are very thankful to have Reverend Thomas Davis lead us in worship this evening. We ask that the Lord would bless his word to us all.
- Again, pass it on to Thomas Davis. We thank him once more. We assure him of our own ongoing prayers for himself, his family, and of course, his congregation in Carly. Thank you very much indeed. It's lovely to see you all.
- And it's a huge blessing and privilege for me to be with you. What an amazingly beautiful night it is. It was lovely to come along the Tolstice Strait and admire the view.
- So it's great to be here and lovely to be able to worship God together. We're going to begin singing to God's praise from Psalm 139 on page 432.
- That's the Scottish Psalter version, Psalm 139, singing from the beginning. O Lord, thou hast me searched and known.
- [1 : 0 2] Thou knowest my sitting down and rising up. Yea, all my thoughts afar to thee are known. Singing down to verse 6. Behind before thou hast beset and laid on me thine hand.
- Such knowledge is too strange for me. Too high to understand. Four stans as we'll stand to sing to God's praise. O Lord, thou hast me searched and known.
- Thou knowest my sitting down. And rising up.
- Yea, all my thoughts afar to thee are known.
- My footsteps and my lying down.
- [2 : 0 9] The compass is always. Thou also whose entirely art acquit with all my ways.
- Thou knowest my sight.
- The compass is well known. The compass is well known to thee. Behind before thou hast beset and laid on me thine hand.
- Such knowledge is too strange for me, too high to understand.
- Let's pray together. Dear God, our Father, we are so thankful that we can come and worship you together this evening. We come on such a beautiful evening.
- [4 : 0 5] We see your glory displayed in the creation around us. And we see your glory revealed in your word as we sing it and read it.
- We're so thankful that we can come together and worship you. And it's such an amazing privilege. It's such a joy for us to come together, to sing your praise, to pray to you, to read and study your word.
- And we thank you for everybody who's here. And we thank you for everything that the psalm we've sung speaks about. The fact that for all of us, whatever our circumstances and whatever our feelings are tonight, you know us and you know everything about us.
- We thank you so much, Father, that as we come to you, there are no secrets with you and nothing's hidden from you. And instead, we can come knowing that even before we open our mouths, you know our needs.

And that's such a comfort to us and it's a reminder to us of your amazing care and love towards us. And we pray that that reality of your care and grace and mercy would fill our hearts with comfort and reassurance as we seek to follow you in our lives and as the congregation here looks forward to sharing the Lord's Supper over this weekend.

[5 : 31] And we pray, Father, for everyone that your blessing would be upon them, that it would be a time of encouragement and refreshment, a time of repentance and renewal, a time of teaching and guiding and a time whereby we are all refreshed in our faith so that we can go on seeking to serve you.

We know that everyone here has, we've all got different burdens. We all come here with a busy week behind us, with much on our minds and many things to make us anxious.

We just come, Father, to lay it all before you. We come to you to be refreshed, to be warmed by your love, to be strengthened by your hand and to be upheld in your arms.

And so we pray, Father, that you would just draw near to each and every one of us, and especially any who feel discouraged or weak or frustrated in their walk with you. We pray that you would just renew and encourage and bless them tonight and over this weekend.

Thank you so much for the congregation here. May your blessing be upon the work of the gospel in this community. We pray that you would just bless and encourage everyone connected to the congregation.

[6 : 56] And we pray especially for Donald that you would be with him in his ministry here, that he would be hugely encouraged and upheld by you. And we remember also Roddy John as he looks forward to coming over the weekend.

We pray that it would be just a really special time for him and for the congregation, where they can both look back with many happy memories of his ministry, but also look forward together for all that you are going to do in this congregation and in this community in the weeks and months ahead.

So we just lay it all into your hands, Father. We look to you because you are the one who's brought us this far, and you are the one who will take us along the path that you want us to follow. And so we pray, Father, as we come to worship you just now, we pray that you would still our hearts and that you would help us to focus our minds.

We pray that we would hear your voice speaking to us in your word. We pray that your spirit would press your word into our hearts, that it would shape us and refine us and make us more and more like your son, our Lord Jesus.

And most of all, we pray that we would indeed just see and know more of Jesus as we worship together tonight. We thank you so much for him. And as we think about all that you've done for us through him, we pray that our faith would increase, that our knowledge would expand, and that our love for you and for one another would deepen and deepen.

[8 : 23] So bless us and thank you so much that we're able to have this time together. May your hand be upon us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to read together from the book of Psalms and Psalm 77.

Psalms 77. We'll read the whole psalm together. I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me.

In the day of my trouble, I seek the Lord. In the night, my hand is stretched out without wearying. My soul refuses to be comforted. When I remember God, I moan.

When I meditate, my spirit faints. You hold my eyelids open. I'm so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, the years long ago.

I said, let me remember my song in the night. Let me meditate in my heart. Then my spirit made a diligent search. Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable?

[9 : 47] Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?

Then I said, I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds.

Your way, O God, is holy. What God is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders. You have made known your might among the peoples. You, with your arm, redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.

When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid. Indeed, the deep trembled. The clouds poured out water. The skies gave forth thunder.

Your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind. Your lightnings lighted up the world. The earth trembled and shook.

[10 : 54] Your way was through the sea. Your path through the great waters. Yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Amen. Amen. This is God's word. May he bless it to us all. We're going to sing again this time from Psalm 46 in the Scottish Psalter on page 271, singing from verse 8.

Psalm 46 on page 271 from verse 8. Come and behold what wondrous works have by the Lord been wrought.

Come see what desolations he on the earth hath brought. Down to the end of the psalm. O our God who is the Lord of hosts is still upon our side. The God of Jacob, our refuge forever will abide.

Let's stand and sing these verses to God's praise. Come and behold what wondrous works have by the Lord been wrought.

[12 : 10] Come see what desolations he on the earth hath brought.

And to the ends of all the earth wars into peace he turns.

The poor he breaks, the spirit he cuts. If I ever shall have your curse.

Be still and know that I am God.

Among the heathen I will be exalted by your death.

[13 : 30] Will be exalted by your death. And God who is the Lord of hosts is still upon our side.

The God of Jacob, our refuge forever will abide.

Well as we turn to God's word let's just pray together for a moment. Dear God our Father we pray that as we look at your word together now we would indeed be still and know that you are God.

And we pray that as we study your word we would know you more. And that you would give us ears that can hear your voice. That we would have minds that can understand what you are saying.

And that we would have hearts that burn with love for you and for one another. Amen. Well I'd like us to turn together back to Psalm 77.

[15 : 01] And we're going to look together at the whole Psalm. But if we're going to take our text. I'd like to take the words at the start of verse 3.

When I remember God. I moan. Now that probably does not sound like the most inspiring text for us to look at.

But please stick with me because I hope that it's actually going to be helpful. If we were going to give our sermon a title it would be the wrong way to think about God.

As we look at our society today I think it's safe to say that most of us, all of us, spend a lot of time forgetting. About God. It's true of the culture around us.

And we are all realising that we live in a very different time now. To what life was like when many of you were children. Even when I was a child.

[16:02] Not that long ago. God was a much, much bigger part of our island's culture. He was much more in people's thoughts.

There was a far greater awareness I think of God in our own society here. And as a nation, if you go back a wee bit further in Scottish history. About 150 years ago.

Everywhere. Every part of society. God was woven in. In a very powerful way. Whether that was schools, universities, social care, government, literature, arts.

The Bible. And the reality of God. Was prominent. In all of it. And today is so different. You think of all these areas of society.

School, arts, government. God has been pushed further and further. To one side. But it's not just true as a society as a whole. It's also true as individuals. I think it would be really interesting to go around every person in Tolstain.

[17:07] To ask them. How many times have you thought about God this week? And I don't know what the answer to that would be. But what I am very confident is that the answer today.

Would be a lot lower than what it would have been 50 years ago. And we see that. We see that in our own culture.

In the highlands and islands. More and more and more. Or what was once an area of communities saturated with the gospel. It's not like that now.

I don't know if any of you are fans of RunRig. Absolutely love RunRig. And they have a song that captures this so powerfully. They have a song called Empty Glens.

But it's actually about church. And it's about the fact that people in our communities no longer attend church. And so the churches across the highlands and islands are like empty glens.

[18:05] And there's some lyrics which I think are very powerful. The second verse says, Science breaking down the door. And all the hordes go rushing through for more.

All the thrills of the world. And all her idols. Where have they gone? Where have they gone? Gone to illusion. Everyone.

And what that's capturing is the fact that people have departed from the gospel. God has been forgotten about all across our society. And instead people have gone running after a mindset that focuses on the material and that focuses on the instant.

In other words, ultimate reality is now understood in physical terms rather than in spiritual terms. And what really matters to people is what happens in the here and now. What we experience.

And all of those things is just leaving God way back in the distance. But I think that forgetting about God is not just something that happens to a society, to a community.

[19:12] It's something that we can do as believers as well. And what I mean by that is the fact that in all the busyness of life. In all the pressures that we're under.

In all the practical needs that we have to attend to. In all the distractions that consume our attention. Leaves us in a situation where we don't think about God nearly as much as we should.

And I am guilty of that myself. I have lost count of the amount of times I've started my day. And I've sat down at my desk and I've thought, right, I want to make sure I stop every hour just to pray for a few minutes. Just for maybe one minute every hour.

I want to keep close to the Lord all day. And every hour I'll stop, even just for 30 seconds or a minute, to pray. And then I start working and I forget all about it.

And it's so easy with all the pressures that we're under for God to be forgotten. And so that gives me a really easy sermon tonight.

[20 : 10] I just need to come here and say, you need to remember God. And that will fix everything. Well, it's really easy to say that. And I suppose at a very basic level it's true.

We do need to remember God. We do need to think about him. But Psalm 77 is amazing. Because it doesn't actually say that.

And it recognizes that it's not as simple as that. In fact, this psalm is so outstandingly honest and real that it speaks about something that we've probably all experienced.

But we're maybe a bit afraid to actually admit. What this psalm is saying is that sometimes thinking about God can actually make you feel worse.

And you see that in verses 1 to 3. I cry aloud to God. Aloud to God. And he will hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord.

[21 : 19] In the night my hand is stretched out without wearing. My soul refuses to be comforted. When I remember God, I moan. When I meditate, my spirit faints.

Now that maybe sounds a wee bit controversial. But if we stop and think about it, I think it's true. Have you ever thought about your prayer life and felt guilty?

Have you ever thought about how God is sovereign and he's in control of everything that happens? And yet you look at your own circumstances or you look at events that are happening in the world and you think, Why is God allowing this to happen?

Have you ever thought about God's commands and then remembered the moral mistakes that you've made and you feel a huge sense of shame and frustration and sorrow?

Have you ever thought about how good and kind and beautiful God is? And then you feel like you're just such a letdown to him? Have you ever thought about God and eternity?

[22 : 32] And then felt, I am really scared about what's going to happen when I die? I think all of these things are examples of what verse 3 describes because they're all situations where thinking about God can actually make us feel worse.

And I think that actually explains why so many people today want to avoid thinking about God. I don't think people have moved on from God because they've discovered a philosophy that decisively proves God's non-existence.

Because there is no philosophy that does that. People have moved on from God because thinking about Him makes them feel uncomfortable. And I think that's something that we can all experience from time to time.

And if we're honest, I think it's something that we can also experience as we approach a communion weekend. Sometimes we stop and examine ourselves. And we're just a bit frustrated and disappointed.

All of this is telling us that we don't have... This psalm is not presenting us with a binary choice to say, you know, we either think about God or we don't think about God.

[23 : 48] The challenge that we face is that if we are going to think about God instead of forgetting about Him, we need to make a choice between thinking about God in the wrong way and thinking about God in the right way.

And these two alternatives are set before us very powerfully in Psalm 77. And these are the two things I want us to think about. How we can think about God in the wrong way and how we can think about God in the right way.

And the secret for getting it right is hidden in this psalm. But I'm not going to tell you what it is until the end of our sermon.

So first of all, thinking about God the wrong way. The first half of this psalm, as you'll have seen, is very somber. And that's one of the reasons why the psalms are so amazing.

Because they include the lows and the struggles of life as well as the joyful, triumphant moments. So if you look at the first half of the psalm, you've got verses 1 to 9.

[24 : 49] And you can actually subdivide that section into two parts. Because verse 1 to 4 describes how for the psalmist, things are rubbish right now.

And then verses 5 to 9 talk about how things seemed so much better back then. And we can so easily fall into both of these traps.

If you look at verse 1 to 4, you see the psalmist is in trouble. He's crying out to God. And it looks as though he can't sleep. He speaks about it being in the night, about his eyelids being open. And whatever his circumstances are, he is feeling overwhelmed.

And so even though he's thinking about God in the midst of all of this, he's not experiencing comfort. In fact, as verse 3 describes so vividly, remembering God makes him moan.

His thoughts are making his spirit faint. And that's describing somebody who is so disheartened spiritually. And his sorrow is compounded when he thinks about the past.

[25 : 55] I consider the days of old, the years of long ago, verse 5 tells us. Everything seemed so much better back then. Now it feels like God is spurning them.

That he's forgotten them. That his love has ceased. And it's so easy to do that. We can find ourselves thinking about God. And all it does is make us feel like things are rubbish now.

And that things were so much better back then. That's true of our society. Today we look at things and we think, Oh man, things were so much better in the past. We can look at the church and we can think, Oh man, there were so many more people coming to church 30, 40, 50 years ago.

And most of all, I think this kind of mindset affects us as individuals. We can look at ourselves and we feel like we're a disappointment to God. And maybe many of us feel like things were better in the past.

I used to have a brightness that I don't have now. I used to have a zeal that I don't have now. And now I've got a whole pile of bruises that I didn't have then.

[27 : 10] Now it's important for us to recognise that when it comes to the sentiments in the first half of this psalm, Not all of it's wrong. In some ways, much of it is good.

Because the Bible never ever advocates a kind of, You know, you must pretend everything is fine sort of mindset. So when things are hard, God wants us to say that they're hard.

And when we have questions, God wants us to ask them. And so there are some ways in which we need to be a bit more like the psalmist in verses 1 to 9.

We should be more bothered when things are wrong in our lives or in the lives of people around us. And we should be badgering God with our questions. We should be pleading with him when we want him to be at work among us.

So it's not all bad. A lot of what's been expressed here is good. And there's a very real sense in which the worst way we can react to difficult circumstances is just to be not bothered at all.

[28 : 08] But at the same time, if all of these thoughts just lead us to despair, If looking at our society or our churches or ourselves as individuals just leaves us wanting to moan, Then it means that we're thinking about God in the wrong way.

And this is so incredibly important. When you think about God, it should not make your heart sink.

And when you think about your life as an individual believer, And when you think about your life together and the future together for you as a congregation, It should not make your heart sink.

When you examine yourself, it should not just leave you crippled with guilt. And it absolutely should not leave you thinking, I'd be better off just not thinking about God.

But to avoid all that from happening, We've got to think about God in the right way. And that's what we see in the second half of the psalm.

[29 : 27] It shows us how to think about God in the right way. At verse 10 to 11, there's a turning point in the psalm. Then I said, I'll appeal to this to the years of the right hand of the Most High.

I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your wonders of old. From this point on, there's a much clearer and healthier focus on God in the psalm.

And that's achieved by the verbs that you can see in verses 11 and 12. It's always good, whenever you're reading a passage of the Bible, Always good to look out for the verbs. You see them there at 11, you've got remember, And then you've got remember again.

Then you've got ponder in verse 12. You've got meditate. These verbs all speak of a very deliberate going over and over in your mind.

As you think about God, about who he is, and what he's done. And that's an incredibly important point right at the start of this second half of the psalm.

[30 : 31] It's reminding us that if we're going to think about God in the right way, It can't just be passing thoughts that just fly into our head and fly out. So often that can be the way life is.

I'm so guilty of that myself. In every way, life is so busy. Our heads are so full. It's like our thoughts, they go in one side of our mind. They're out the other side before we know it.

Yet this psalm speaks of a different way of thinking. Where we stop. And where we allow our thoughts of God to go round and round in our minds.

Thinking about God is a little bit like making a loaf of bread. If you imagine making a loaf of bread and you've got all the ingredients, You chuck them in a bowl, mix them up, bang it in the oven. What are you going to end up with?

You're going to end up with a very flat, hard and pretty unpleasant loaf. If you want proper bread, what do you need to do? You need to get the dough and you need to knead it and knead it and knead it and knead it and knead it over and over and over again.

[31 : 39] You need to let it prove. You need to give it time. And when you do that, when it comes out of the oven, you have a big, risen, expansive loaf.

That's what the psalmist is doing in the second half of the psalm. He starts kneading with a K his thoughts about God.

And as he does so, he realises five things. And he describes them in verses 13 to 15.

First of all, he sees that God is holy. In particular, he says, Your way, O God, is holy.

Now, when we hear that word holy, it's important to remember that we don't mean, you know, something just vague and mystical. We don't mean, you know, floating around in the clouds or anything like that.

[32 : 38] Holiness means to be set apart. And therefore, it speaks of purity and cleanliness, something that is undefiled. I find it very helpful to think of the opposite of holiness as corruption.

If something is corrupt, then it's not pure. If something has been corrupted, it's no longer set apart. It's no longer different. And you can think of corruption spatially in terms of cleanliness.

So if you imagine a surgical instrument, that has to be sterilised and set apart so that it doesn't get contaminated. And if it does get contaminated, it can no longer be used for the operation.

Even more so, though, we can think of holiness ethically. People whose behaviour, who is impure, dark, cruel, evil, that's unholy.

And the tragedy of human history is that very often corruption in terms of behaviour gets worse and worse as people get more and more powerful.

[33 : 42] God is the opposite of corruption. God is the opposite of all of that. He's the complete opposite of corruption. And so he is utterly pure spatially.

So absolutely nothing, nothing unclean or undefiled can come close to God. And he is utterly pure ethically.

There is absolutely no corruption or deceit or twistedness in God. His ways are never crooked. He's never a cheater, never a liar.

He never spins things. He never betrays people. He never exploits people. One thing you can be absolutely sure of is that God will always be straight with you.

And that's why it's important to make sure that you think of God as a good doctor and not as an expensive hairdresser.

[34 : 38] Because if you go to an expensive hairdresser, they're going to tell you that you look amazing, even though they've probably made you look ridiculous. But if you go to a good doctor, they're going to tell you exactly what's wrong with you and exactly what you need.

That's what God is like. He's straight and fair and true and reliable and honest. That's because his ways are holy. And every single one of us, I think, can recognize that in a world that is full of deceit and exploitation and spin, that kind of straight, pure holiness is something we crave.

The psalmist sees that God's ways are holy. Second thing he sees is that God is incomparable. You see that in the second half of verse 13. What God is great like our God.

He is incomparable. Now, we can see that, you know, we can just take that at a very basic level and recognize that nothing compares to God.

And that's absolutely true. And it's very helpful to recognize that. But I think it's even more helpful to work the dough a little bit more on this one as well. If you look at the society around us, it's full of idols.

[36 : 05] Full of things that people are chasing and full of things that people will make the most important thing in their lives. And we can pick some and compare the greatness of that idol with God's greatness.

So one of the biggest idols that people pursue today is the idol of comfort. People want to be comfortable. Comfortable in our homes, in our finances, in our jobs, on our holidays, in terms of our physical health.

And that desire for comfort can become an idol. It becomes the thing that matters most to us. And I think for many people, looking back over the past 20 or 30 years, the big dream in life, the goal in life, is pretty much to be young, rich, and more or less retired.

And that seems to be like the current ideal of comfort, to have plenty money, plenty time, and not very much hassle.

And there's lots of ways in which, at first glance, that's quite an attractive idol. But is it as great as God? Is the temporary comfort of a nice house or lots of holidays as good as the eternal comfort of being a beloved child of God?

[37 : 22] Is the temporary provision of a cracking pension as good as the eternal inheritance that God promises to all who trust him? Is looking forward to a nice holiday as good as looking forward to seeing the sheer beauty and majesty and splendor of God in the face of Jesus Christ?

And everything that we see here, that we admire, even tonight, the absolutely stunning night that's around us outside tonight, that's just a glimpse, a tiny glimpse of how beautiful God is.

What about the idol of approval? That's another idol that so many of us want. We love to be well thought of by others. Whether that's by a guy or a girl that we like, or whether it's by our colleagues, whether it's getting good results in our exams, whether it's even just getting lots of attention on social media.

Approval is so appealing. But is that as good as the creator of the universe saying to you, I have loved you forever?

What about the idol of power? That's another idol we often pursue. Humans crave power, whether that's to run a nation, or whether it's just to shake our fist at someone who's packed badly at the co-op.

[38 : 48] We're hungry for power, and yet so often power is disappointing. And so often humanity is powerless to do the stuff that really matters, to end poverty, to cure diseases, to heal broken hearts.

And all too often power is misused. Humanity uses power to do awful things. Is any of that better than God?

The God who is all-powerful, and who is utterly, eternally good. The psalmist is working the dough on God, and he's recognizing that he's incompatible.

The third thing he recognizes is that God does amazing things. Verse 14a, You are the God who works wonders. And this raises a really interesting question, because a lot of people struggle, I mean, a lot of people in our society will struggle with the idea of miracles, and people will be skeptical about what the Bible talks about in terms of God working wonders, whether that's in the Old Testament, or in particular in the Gospels, in the work of Jesus.

People want to, you know, they want to be able to just, to put all that to one side, and say that it doesn't happen. But yet, you stop and ask yourself, do you want a world view, where nothing amazing happens?

[40 : 14] Do you want a world view, where nothing amazing can happen? And I don't just mean in terms of miracles, it actually applies in lots of ways, because that's what happens if you remove God from your world view.

You end up with a world view where nothing amazing can happen, because you stand looking at a stunning sunset, and it's just light entering your eyes, and it's triggering a chemical response in your brain.

You see amazing acts of charity, and you think, well, it's actually just a misguided waste of energy, because it's all about survival of the fittest. You fall in love with somebody, but really it's just an overexcited reproductive instinct.

Do you see what happens when you take God out of your world view? You make it impossible for anything to actually be ontologically wonderful.

And in its place, all you have is an illusion. But with God at the center of your world view, the God who works wonders, you can ground your reality in that fact, you ground your understanding of reality in that fact, the fact that God is the God who can work wonders.

[41 : 33] So when you enjoy the splendor of a Hebridean sunset, when you're experiencing the joy of loving someone and of being loved by them, when you experience the beauty of showing kindness to others, all of that is the handiwork of God.

He's the God who works wonders. Then the fourth thing the psalmist speaks about is the fact that God is revealing His might. You have made known your might among the peoples.

In terms of God working wonders, one of the key things that He's doing is revealing His might. And that's because God wants you to know that He is strong.

And that's crucial for understanding who God really is. He alone is the Almighty One. He alone is sovereign. He alone is God. And that's reminding us that every single time we replace God with something else, something that isn't God, every time we put our confidence in an idol, we are trusting in something that is ultimately going to prove itself to be weak.

And you see that again and again in the world around us. People placing all their hope and confidence. And I've done it myself over the years. We've done it ourselves.

[42 : 53] You know, we think, for example, oh, if I can just, you know, you know, maybe we're studying. If I can just graduate, then everything will be fine. And then you discover that it was actually quite weak because you do graduate, but then not much changes.

You think, if I can just build my house, that will be strong enough to make me happy. If I build my dream house, and then you finally do it, and you think, I don't feel that different.

It's nice to have the house, but there's still a longing in my heart for more. And all of these things that we chase because we think they're going to be strong enough to fill us actually show themselves to be weak.

God alone is the one who is strong. He is the one who can provide. He is the one who can satisfy. He is the one who can lead us. And all of this culminates in the fifth thing that the psalmist highlights, the fact that God saves his people.

And he does that by his strength. Verse 15, you with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. God is using his strength to save his people.

[44 : 15] And this is such an amazing truth about God that the Bible reveals to us again and again. It tells us that he's strong, but he doesn't display his strength as a showman so that we can admire him like we admire an athlete or a fast car or something like that.

God doesn't display his strength in order to show off. God displays his strength in order to save. He displays his strength as he rescues us and saves us forever.

And for the psalmist, the great example of God using his strength to save his people was in the Exodus, which is what he describes in the last five verses of the psalm.

But we have the amazing privilege of knowing that the Exodus, the great event of the Old Testament, was actually just a shadow. It was a shadow of an even greater display of strength.

A shadow of an even greater act of redemption. Because we know now that the Exodus was pointing forward to something else. It was pointing forward to the cross.

[45 : 30] And that means that as we think about how God acts and uses his strength in order to save his people, we need to be thinking about the cross. And as you think about the cross, you discover more clearly than ever that God is holy.

Because it's on the cross that you see just how serious sin is. It's on the cross you see that sin must be atoned for with blood. It's on the cross you see that the debt that sin accrues has got to be paid in full.

The stain of sin must be washed away. It's on the cross you discover that God is incomparable because in paying that cost he takes it upon himself.

And God the Father hands over God the Son to die in our place. On the cross you discover that God is doing amazing things because by giving his Son as a sacrifice for sin the power of death is broken and the greatest work of wonder ever is accomplished.

Jesus rises again. And on the cross you discover that God is revealing his might. On the cross the kingdom of evil is defeated death is conquered and the world that was so full of brokenness can now be a world that is full of hope.

[47 : 08] hope. And on the cross you discover that God has come to save you. That's the whole purpose of the cross.

Jesus coming so that you might be saved. And this is where we see something that is utterly astonishing.

Often we can think of God and moan. And we do that because we feel rubbish about ourselves. We feel guilty.

We feel uncertain and inadequate and all the rest of it. And that leaves us feeling unsure. It leaves us feeling discouraged.

It leaves us feeling troubled. And we can very quickly come to the conclusion that God is probably not particularly interested in me. That I'm just a disappointment to him.

[48 : 14] And that others are far better in his sight. We think of God at heart's sink. We moan.

But do you know what the truth really is? The truth is that when sin broke you and me and when sin put us on a path that leads to death God thought of you and he moaned.

Now not moaning in the sense of rolling his eyes in frustration but moaning as in saying I don't want to lose them.

I don't want this to be the end of the story. And as God was moved by his eternal compassion he was willing to send his son and his son was willing to come and die all so that you might be God's precious child forever.

And all of that means that to think about God in the right way your thoughts have got to go through the cross. If we're going to think about God in the right way our thoughts have got to go through the cross because if your thoughts about God don't go through the cross then your thoughts are either going to be too soft or too harsh.

[49 : 51] They'll be too soft in the sense that if we don't go through the cross we might find ourselves thinking that sin's not that big a deal that God doesn't really matter and we can just wander along and everything will be fine.

That's too soft. But more likely your thoughts are going to be too harsh because you're going to think that I've failed and I've let God down and I'm rubbish and I'm not the way I should be. But if you go through the cross all of those stains have been washed away.

all of those mistakes have been forgotten by God. All of your debts have been paid.

And if we do that, if our thoughts about God go through the cross then you will no longer think about God and feel guilty.

You'll no longer think about God and feel bad. You'll no longer think about God and moan. Instead you will think about God and say wow.

[51 : 03] You will think about God and say thank you father. You will think about God and find peace.

peace. This psalm is warning us against thinking about God in the wrong way.

And it's teaching us to think about God in the right way. Remember at the start I said that this psalm contains the secret for how you actually do it.

So I'm saying to you, how do you do this? We need to think about God not in the wrong way but think about God in the right way. The secret for how you do it is hidden right here in this psalm.

Did any of you spot what it was? Because it's right there. In this psalm there is a very clear shift from I to you.

[52 : 07] If you look at the first half of the psalm one to nine the psalmist is just I cry aloud I seek God I'm not comforted I moan I think about the days of the old and will despair in the Lord forever I I I I But in the second part the psalmist looks to God and he says you you you you you are holy you work wonders you have made known your might you have redeemed your people and if you are here looking into looking ahead to the communion weekend and if you're feeling a bit low or unsure if you feel just low and rubbish in your Christian walk then please don't go into the weekend thinking

I've not done this and I've let that slip or I've let that leave all the eyes behind and replace them with you's you father are my father you Jesus are the friend who sticks closer than a brother you holy spirit are my comforter you have done everything and if we do that if we remember you you you Lord you you are the one who saves then we will think about him in the right way and if you're here and I don't know if anybody is here and maybe thinking about professing faith at the Lord's table I am a thousand percent sure that whatever is holding you back is an I I'm I'm not good enough yet I don't know enough I don't know if I can keep it up

I'll probably let the Lord down I'm not like the other Christians I see well chuck all those eyes away because they're not what counts we come to the Lord's table saying you Lord have done everything and we profess faith not by saying to the elders I'm this or I'm that or I'm the next thing we profess faith by saying he's done it all for me he's done what I could never do and that's the right way for us to think about God not not falling over the hurdles that we have put up ourselves and not trapped by our own failings and weaknesses but refreshed and encouraged and renewed by all the use of this psalm by everything that God is by everything that he has done for us in Jesus and by everything that he's promised to do that's the right way to think about God and by his grace may we all think that way ourselves amen let's pray father we we confess that very very often we are consumed with with our own sense of failure and weakness and we pray father that we would again be brought to the cross that our our hearts and our minds and our our lips would be filled with with everything that you are and that you have done and as we think about you and as the congregation thinks about you over these coming days may they be refreshed in their knowledge of you and so aware of how much you love them and of the power and majesty and beauty of the cross we pray that you'd fill their hearts with an ever greater knowledge of all that you have done for us in Jesus we pray too that it would be a time when the church family is bound closer together that the bonds of love within this congregation and with visitors would deepen and deepen we pray we pray for any who may be thinking of professing faith please help them to take that step and for any who are maybe yet to come to faith or who are not sure we pray oh God that that they'd hear your voice speaking to them tonight we ask it all in Jesus name amen we're going to conclude singing from the sing psalms version of psalm 77 that's on page 100 singing from verse 10 psalm 77 sing psalms version on page 100 singing from verse 10 then to my heart there came this thought on this I will rely the years of the right hand of power of him who is most high verses 10 to 15 we'll stand to sing to God's praise then to my heart let me this heart on this I will rely then hear so the right hand of and of I will I'll meditate on all your acts, your mighty deeds and show.

O God, no solely annual waste, but God come here with you.

[59 : 26] You have a God of miracles, whose power is shan't you.

You have redeemed your people, Lord, with your almighty arm.

Jacob, St. Joseph's children you, delivered from our heart.

We've already joined taking that, Lord willing, and a 6pm bilingual prayer meeting. So that's 12 noon service and a 6pm bilingual prayer meeting. Before Thomas does the benediction, just to say, of course, that following the benediction, the session will be open and will be more than glad.

In fact, as Thomas said, we'll be overjoyed to see any belonging to the congregation who wish to publicly profess their faith and their love in Jesus.

[61 : 04] Well, as you go into your weekend, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.