

Only Faith, Hope, And Love Will Not Pass Away

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: 13 December 1981

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] She, her bridegroom, sees. So do our hearts look to thee, Lord Christ, that we might know your love, and with all our hearts follow thee.

Amen. I want you to turn again to 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and it's page 165 in your pew Bible, and to turn, if you will, to verse 8 following, which is the third paragraph.

And let me read those verses which are so familiar to you and to us all. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away.

As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect, and our prophecy is imperfect.

But when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child.

[1 : 22] I reason like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.

Now I know in part. Then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

So faith, hope, love, love, abides. These three, but the greatest of these is love. The first three verses of this chapter speak of the proudest attainments of men and say quite clearly that without agape, without this love which is spoken of, they are nothing, our experiences are as nothing, and the profit of the investment of our whole life yields nothing.

It's not someone else who says they are nothing. It's not someone telling us, your life counts for nothing. It's the echo of our own hearts, whereby we know certainly that whatever our attainments may be, without this love, they amount to nothing.

that's the witness of our hearts to our hearts. Then in the next paragraph, in the simplest possible English prose, as it's been translated from the Greek, it describes exactly and precisely what we are not, while at the same time describing exactly and precisely what we would most like to be.

[3 : 29] Both those things come together in the simplest, most unmistakable English. Love suffers long and is kind.

What we are not and what we would most like to be. Now if you look at the last six verses, it describes the whole range of man's quest through the whole of time and history and how the character of God is revealed and the purpose of man is declared and the meaning of history is announced.

And it begins with the words, love never fails. What it means is that love never falls.

Like earth's proud empires that pass away, we talk of the fall of Rome, the fall of Jerusalem. Fallen, fallen is Babylon.

But love never falls. And even as we are gathered here now, tanks and guns and soldiers are moving across Poland.

[4 : 48] Many of you are old enough to remember that that's happened before in a lifetime of many of us. And as they move across, what they are is the testimony to the fact that another idealism of man, another high hope enshrined, albeit, in the doctrines of Karl Marx has failed.

And the only ultimate language of revolution is guns and tanks and military might, because that alone can change men.

And what it is, is a testimony to a revolution that has failed. The ideas, for all their brilliance and all their insight, they have failed.

And they have failed as have the dreams and architects of human society and human civilization, one after another, down through history.

These proud empires have fallen. And Paul says, love never falls.

[6 : 10] And never will. And never has. If you look at it, you will see what it goes on to say, that prophecies will pass away.

And if Karl Marx is a prophet and Sigmund Freud is a prophet and Thomas Jefferson is a prophet and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and Isaiah are prophets who spoke to their age and perhaps to succeeding ages, what they had to say will ultimately, even though it brings light to men, it will become empty of meaning, useless and unproductive.

That's what it says. Prophecies will fail. They ultimately will not be able to comprehend the whole meaning and purpose of man.

They will not be able to reduce into some working principle of human life, the fulfillment which man was created for.

And though these prophecies may guide and enthrall a generation, they will most certainly be abolished.

[7 : 30] and as for tongues, which for the Corinthians was the ecstasy of religious experience, they will come and they will go like a storm at sea.

They fill the whole of the world as far as you can see and they come and rage and swell and seem to change the whole world, but then in the morning it's gone.

And the ecstasy of man's religious experience will pass like a storm at sea. And knowledge, remember, it's knowledge that puffs people up.

Knowledge which makes us feel superior because we have it and the uninformed and the ignorant don't have it and we understand the secrets of man and the secrets of God and the secrets of nature and that we are puffed up with that knowledge but that knowledge will too be abolished.

The knowledge which sets men apart one from another will come to an end. Not indeed that it doesn't serve its purpose here and now and not indeed that the tongues of ecstasy are not meant to encourage us and that prophecies are meant to direct us but ultimately they will pass.

[9 : 17] The reason is that when that which is perfect comes that which is imperfect will pass away.

And that is the clear statement that all of this which is in part is a preparation for that which is in full. All of this which is incomplete looks towards completion and these are only incomplete grasping by men of the reality and meaning of their own experience and they're going to go because they can't take it any more than all of history has shown us attempt after attempt for men to take hold of that which is the ultimate meaning of their existence and their best attempts have failed to grasp the totality it is still to come.

Paul says when the perfect fulfillment of all prophecy has come prophecy is not required any longer. When the presence of that about which we experience the ecstasy of anticipation has come then that ecstasy will no longer be because we will be in the presence of that of which it was just an anticipation.

And when the sum total of all the knowledge of man has come to the fulfillment as the whole of truth appears to us the knowledge itself will pass away.

[11 : 14] then Paul makes these contrasts and the contrasts are that the partial gives way to the complete. The imperfect is abolished by the coming of that which is perfect.

And he illustrates this by saying when as a child I thought as a child I spoke as a child I reasoned as a child. that's been part of your experience and part of my experience and in due course it gives way to the fact that we have come to some measure of maturity and that no longer applies.

So our whole present understanding will give way to a perfect understanding. then Paul talks about a mirror a mirror in which we see a riddle something which is caught by the corner of our eye and we see it but we can't decipher it we don't know what it means it's there we see it indirectly as through a mirror but there will come a time when it won't be indirectly but it will be face to face we will encounter love in all its fullness and all its completeness now Paul says I tried desperately to understand the world in which

I live there will come a time when I completely understand it so fragmentary is our understanding of it now that the best minds of men are frustrated as they try and say this is what it's all about but Paul says that's because our understanding remains fragmentary but one day it will be complete and when it's complete I will discover to my amazement that I who stumbled about in seeking to understand through all the short misery of my human existence was in every moment and every situation I myself was utterly and completely understood that's the ultimate crown of our understanding not only that we understand but that in that we come to know that we have been

perfectly understood through it all faith teaches us to trust
God we don't fully know him and so we can't relate to him as one who is fully known we live in a world where we're not certain that he always fully understands us and the plight of our human circumstance but faith teaches us to trust him in that situation it is essential to our present relationship to him but even faith will be of no significance when we encounter love and hope which teaches us that beyond every sorrow and every failure and every weakness beyond the most abject and prolonged suffering to which we are subject beyond the power of death itself there is a hope that causes us to endure and we are given that hope to hold on to but when that hope is realized it won't be necessary anymore to hope because it will have been fully realized faith hope and love but the greatest of these is love because love never fails love never comes to an end the love of which [16 : 25] Paul speaks in Corinthians is the love which we taste in the course of our human life it's the love which inspires faith it's the love which inspires hope it's the love towards which prophecy points it's the love that knowledge seeks to take hold of it's the love which all the aesthetic ecstasy of our life seeks to comprehend and experience it's that and we anticipate that now but it's what heaven and the presence of God are all about and we will enter into that love so that that which is imperfect will be finished with and the comparative childishness of our present thinking and speaking and reckoning will be done away with and that love we will experience because what it is is the reality of heaven in the lives of men you see in Poland this morning all the evidence suggests a revolution that is failed but there is and I'm told that it's the committee for the salvation of Poland that is now in control well there is a revolution that is not going to fail because it never fails and that revolution is storming virtually at the gates of our proud and hard hearts that we might submit to that revolution in which the nature and character and purpose of God in all history tries to batter its way into our lives and that's the revolution that won't fail and the revolution that is spoken of here as we sit and listen to the rest of this cantata to the second part

I wonder if we could welcome that revolution into our hearts in the words that will be some look at them if you will welcome most precious one love and faith prepare for you a dwelling in my inmost heart come in to stay to stay thou the father of us all lead us ever lest we fall by thy everlasting might guide our feeble flesh aright even with muted feeble voices can God's majesty be praised for aided by the spirit power our feeble cries become so loud that they reach God in heaven praise to God sing everyone amen to

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[22 : 29] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[27 : 01] I'll see you next time.

I'll see you next time.

I'll see you next time.

I'll see you next time.

I'll see you next time.

[29 : 31] I'll see you next time.