

Male & Female

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: 27 August 1989

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Our God, we have brought our children to be baptized. We have brought ourselves to be confronted by your word.

And we ask that by your Holy Spirit, you will take your word and confront each of us in the circumstances of our private and personal lives at the deepest level of our hearts.

In Jesus' name we pray this. Amen. Amen. I find myself somewhat jealous, I suppose, of the profound interest that was shown in the Voyager passing Triton, a moon of Saturn on the outer edges of what appears to be a dead universe.

I mean, it's a dead planet. All the super technocrats are bent over their computers and the amazing technology that goes into giving us that glance.

Now, I am not criticizing that. I mean, I am, but I'm, you know, I... The point of reference for me is...

[1 : 31] Our business is to know the living God. And yet we are fascinated by a dead planet.

And I think that's part of the problem of our world. And the difficulty is, you see, that the super technocrats will never bring us to a knowledge of God.

They can never do it. God has chosen to reveal himself to the hearts of people like you.

And it's breaking through the hardness of our hearts that is the function of the Word of God.

So that what the technologists can see through their computers, we can see through the reality of God's having chosen in great humility to make himself available to the hearing response of faith from the hearts of each one of us.

[2 : 56] We can know God. The mysteries of Saturn have only begun to be understood.

The profound reality of God is something that all of us need to be involved in. And in order to get you involved in it, there's this story that was read this morning.

If you look at the bulletin carefully, you will see that there's the problem of reading Ezekiel 16. Now, you may not know the whole of Ezekiel 16, but after seeing it written out in the bulletin, I decided we can't do it.

That if we read nothing but Ezekiel 16 to you this morning, you'd all go home in profound state of shock and depression. And so I leave you to read that on your own.

I read just enough to introduce you to the magnificent lady who is portrayed to us in that. We're caught up in the series of sermons about God made them male and female, and the powerful dynamics that come out of the encounter between male and female.

[4 : 19] Far more powerful than I think we ever imagined. When you look at Adam and Eve, as we did, at Isaac and Rebecca, at Samson and Delilah, at Ahab and Jezebel.

And last week we looked at Abraham and Sarah and the poisonous third party to the relationship and what happened because of it.

And today we're looking at a man that is the Lord God and a woman that is the city of Jerusalem.

And in order to understand the relationship between the Lord God and that city, Ezekiel tells it to us in terms of a relationship between a man and a woman.

The profound significance of this to my mind is that in the dynamics of a relationship between a man and a woman, God reveals some of the profundity of his relationship to his people.

[5 : 40] The nature of his love for his people and the nature of their response to his love. And so you have this beautiful and tragic love story.

It's a story of a child that was abandoned. In those days, I guess, the technology of abortion wasn't developed to the extent that it is now.

And so a child was born and then left in a field to die. And that was the method, I suppose, of abortion, aborting the life of a child.

And this child that Ezekiel tells us was born of an Amorite and a Hittite, this female child was taken and was abandoned.

It came to birth, but on the day of its birth it was abhorred. There was no cleansing, there was no salt, there was no pity, there was no cutting of the umbilical cord, there was no cleaning of the blood, there was nothing.

[6 : 59] The child was taken and abandoned and would certainly have died. Except that, the Lord said, you shall live. You see, which is what happens to all of us.

Except the Lord says, you shall live, you die. He said to this child, you shall live. And it grew up naked and a wild child.

And then it came to, this child came to years of maturity and developed the hair and the breasts and it came to the time for love and the Lord came and claimed this child.

and took her to be his wife. And she was given maturity, she was given the covenant of marriage, she was given dignity, she was washed, she was anointed with oil, she was clothed in leather and linen and silk, she was given ornaments and bracelets and earrings and a ring in her nose, she was given chains for her neck and a crown for her head and gold and silver of the finest and food that was the best possible food of oil and honey and fine flour and she became a great and very, very beautiful woman in response to the Lord who had husbanded her and brought her from being an abandoned child to being an extremely beautiful woman.

woman says of her that her beauty was perfect through the splendor which the Lord bestowed upon her.

[9 : 09] She was an extremely beautiful woman and then it says, alas, we understand this, you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot so that having come through this relationship to this place of great beauty and splendor this woman turned from her trust in the one who had brought her there to a trust in her own beauty and used her own beauty to play the harlot.

A harlot only in certain ways because she wasn't paid by her lovers. She paid her lovers. She squandered all the gifts that her Lord had given her.

She abandoned her children. And so you see that when her trust shifted from the Lord to her own resources which was her beauty suddenly everything was turned upside down.

And that's what happens to us too. We have brought these children into a covenant relationship to their God through faith in Jesus Christ.

We have claimed the inheritance and the promises of God for these children and we have promised to bring them up so that there will never come a time in their lives when they turn from trusting in the Lord to trusting in themselves and their own beauty or prowess power or whatever it may be.

[10 : 55] Well, two or three things I want to tell you about that. The first thing I want to tell you about it is this, that when we are born and brought to baptism, we are claiming a promise that God has made to us and God will be faithful to that promise.

Through all your days and through all the circumstances of all your days, God will be faithful to the promise that he has made.

He will be utterly faithful. You will never come to a place or a time when you can prove the Lord's unfaithfulness to you.

He will be faithful. And when we come and respond to that faithfulness that God has shown us of himself and promised to us, when we respond by submitting to baptism, we're trying to learn from the one who is faithful to us.

We're trying to learn to be faithful to him. His faithfulness is to teach us faithfulness in our response. And it takes us all of our lives to do it.

[12 : 25] To learn even to begin to respond in faith to the God who has committed himself to be faithful to us. Now, what I think this means, is, because it's a powerful story, I think God has given us a laboratory in which we can run certain experiments on what it means to be faithful.

And we run these experiments in this laboratory in which one person in the laboratory says to the other, I will be faithful to you.

And the other might say, and I have been unfaithful to you. Well, how do we renew the covenant? Well, we renew the covenant by one person being able in repentance and confession to claim forgiveness from the other, and the other person being able to offer forgiveness.

So that in that relationship, in that laboratory, we sometimes play the part of God saying, I will be faithful, and sometimes we play the part of the penitent, one who has learned, gone, and trusted in

themselves, and to say, I will repent, and I will seek forgiveness.

Now, the laboratory, of course, is marriage. That's where these experiments are carried on.

Experiments in learning what it means to be faithful.

[14:12] Experiments, alas, in learning how much our hearts are given to unfaithfulness. How easy it is to turn from trust and confidence to reliance upon yourself and your own resources.

And that's what happens. And that's why I think God, who has committed himself to us to be faithful, we who in baptism commit ourselves to God to learn to be faithful in response to his faithfulness to us, he says, now, if you want a practical way of working that out, work it out in your relationship to one another.

Try it sometime. Learn what it is to be faithful when someone is unfaithful to you, and learn what it is, alas, to be unfaithful when someone continues faithful to you, and then you will know something of the cost that's involved in God being faithful to us.

Now, the story of the woman in Ezekiel ends with a terrible catalog which you might shudder to read in Ezekiel 16, a terrible catalog of her unfaithfulness, of her turning away from the one who loved her and enriched her and made her beautiful beyond any other, as she turns from him and turns from him and turns from him, and he, when she has destroyed her beauty, she has squandered her wealth, she no longer has anything by which she might claim the love and response of the one who has committed himself to her, when she's lost every claim to it.

You go to the end of Ezekiel 16 and you read these words. Her Lord comes to her and says, I will establish my covenant with you and you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be confounded and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord God.

[16:46] The Lord remains faithful. That is the good news. That is what, that is the, in a sense, the key phrase that explains why Jesus went to the cross to demonstrate publicly for us that no matter how cruel and how self-sufficient and how blasphemous we become, the God who has covenanted himself to us, goes even to death to demonstrate his faithfulness.

And by that death he renews the covenant with us through forgiveness, through repentance, confession, and forgiveness. He renews the covenant in order that we might know that he is the Lord, in order that we might know God.

Now, you see, the wonderful thing of this, to my mind, is that the knowledge of God is not somewhere in the outer reaches of space.

space. You don't have to explore the outer reaches of space to know God. The place you have to explore is the depths of your own heart and expose your own heart to the covenanted faithfulness of God in order that you might know very deeply the reality of his forgiveness, the reality of his profound concern that in renewing his covenant with you, you might know that he is the Lord.

And that, you see, is something that's available to us all. That comes from confessing with our mouths that Jesus is Lord.

[19:00] believing in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead. We suddenly come to know God and to know that the ultimate reality of our lives is that no matter what happens to us, no matter what circumstances may overtake us, we will never come to the point where God relinquishes his promised faithfulness to us.

He said, I will be your God and you will be my people. He continues to mean that. Our hearts may come to the place where we utterly reject it, where we in anger and frustration throw it away, but even that won't change the fact that God, in his love for us, renews the covenant in order that we might know that he is the Lord.

Amen. Amen.