

Be Still, God Is Our Refuge

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[0 : 00] Our God, we turn our hearts and minds and all our being to your word. We would, by your grace and in your mercy, be enabled to submit the whole of ourselves to the obedience of your word in and by reason of the faith that you have given us in Jesus Christ.

So we ask that your Holy Spirit may take that word and by that word renew and restore our lives and our life together as a congregation.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

There are so many things that I'd like to mention to you, but you see around you the results of six months of the restoration of the church building and the wonderful work that's gone into it, the leadership that's been given in the whole building project and the skill of the craftsmen who've done the work and the love and care of all sorts of people who have contributed directly to the work by their involvement in it and those who've contributed to the work by their gifts towards it.

And so there's a great deal to be thankful for. And yet the work has to go on and the restoring and restructuring of our life together as a congregation is something that goes on all the time and must inevitably go on.

[2 : 17] We drift apart from one another. Differences come between us. Misunderstandings are created. Sins are not confessed and therefore cannot be forgiven.

And pride and arrogance started out as putty, sometimes turns to steel. And self-sufficiency and self-centeredness take over our lives.

And our egos become massive, like great prehistoric reptiles that get so big they can't move.

And all those things happen so that the gracious and merciful, redemptive work of our God needs to go on in our lives all the time and in our relationship to one another.

And we have set before us such a beautiful example of what restoration can do. The new discovery of the outside of the church is one of the things you can't see from inside of it.

[3 : 31] But it was one of the delights of the reconstruction process. And the way everything finally came together after months of dust and chaos and disruption and breakdown, everything came together.

And I just pray that we as a congregation might come together, finding love and forgiveness and understanding, reaching out to one another, and opening our hearts in a new way to the coming of our King, that he may be Lord in our lives and Lord in our congregation.

A verse I want to talk to you about this morning is taken from Psalm 46, and it's a familiar verse to most of you.

It's verse 10 of Psalm 46, and it's on page 499 in your pew Bible. And it simply says, Be still and know that I am God.

I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

[5 : 07] And that word is addressed to us in our restlessness and in our turbulence. And it's addressed to our whole world. And the restoration of the church is to give us a place where we may encounter God's command to be still and know that he is God.

And a place where we may open our hearts to him enabling us to do what he commands us. The work of God is not completed when he has given the command.

The work of God is only completed when he has enabled us to respond. And so our stillness needs to be the result of his command to be still and know that he is God.

The purpose of this, you will see, is, and if you look at the text, I am exalted among the nations.

I am exalted in the earth. I am exalted in the earth. I am exalted in the earth. I am exalted in the earth. And that we need to be still and to recognize that.

[6 : 32] Because of the stress and busyness of our lives, we fail to recognize that. And if, in a wonderful way, this building can help us to be still, can in a sense induce that stillness into us that we may know God and that we may know that God is exalted among all the nations.

God is exalted in all the earth. And all the pride and pomposity of our lives, all the idolatry which we exalt by our disobediences, all those things are torn down and it is evident to us that God is indeed exalted.

We have to be, we have to let, we have to know that he is exalted because, and again, I turn you to the text which says, the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.

In that most amazing reality of our faith, there is no time when we are not in a majority.

No matter how lonely we may be, no matter how desolate we may feel, no matter how extreme are the circumstances of our lives, the Lord of hosts is with us that's the great reality.

[8 : 25] And there's no place in that for our arrogance and self-sufficiency, for our unforgiveness. There's just no place for it because the Lord of hosts is with us and our trust is in him.

And then the lovely last line of it is that the God of Jacob is our refuge. You know, it's not unfamiliar to hear people say, I've moved 23 times in 24 years or something like that.

Always looking for a refuge, always looking for a place where we can settle. And ultimately there is no place. And we may wander to and fro across the face of the earth.

And the only refuge we will ever find is in the God of Jacob, who is our refuge, he alone. And people, you know, like us, we've trusted this situation and we've thought it would go on forever.

And we've trusted this relationship and we thought it would go on forever. And we've trusted this job and this form of security and we thought that it would go on forever. And we've trusted in our good health and God's benefits to us and thought that would go on forever.

[9 : 49] But we are relentlessly driven in the course of our lives to the place where we recognize that there is no refuge except in the God of Jacob.

And we rejoice greatly in that. Now, how are we to go about the business of restructuring our lives or restoring them?

And with this, we come to the end of a series on the catechism. And I'd like you to turn to page 555 in your prayer book. And to use this as a kind of working drawings by which to seek to put into effect the restoring and restructuring of our lives in terms of the God who commands us to be still, the God who is with us and the God who is our ultimate refuge.

And it says to us that the way we do it, the way we organize our lives is first to be regular in our attendance at public worship.

My goal in my mind is to make this a place where God is regularly worshipped and that each of us should make it our business to know that since we are worshipping most of the time and we are commanded to bow down to the idols of our heathen culture and we do it with ready submission so often, it takes a kind of determination that we will deliberately make it our business regularly to join with other believers in attendance at worship, at public worship.

[12 : 11] Then it says what the focus of that public worship is when it says that you are to be especially at the Holy Communion. That is, you're to be reminded and brought, as it were, before the cross of Christ, the place where God humbled himself and where God would find us humbled in acknowledgement of him and so that the new restructuring of our church is dominated by a cross and at the foot of that cross we are called to come and to partake regularly of the Holy Communion in order that we may kneel and receive from the hand of our God who came among us and died for us.

The next thing that we're called upon to do is the practice of private prayer to build into our lives, you see, that to me is the most, it's the loveliest thing and the thing about which we know so little about being still and having a quiet time in our lives, a place where we can pray, a place where we can read our Bible, a place where we can exercise ourselves in self-discipline.

It's all those things. The most profound thing about our life must be that we can communicate with God.

The most perpetual thing about our life is that we should feed daily on the Word of God and the appropriate response of the whole of our lives is that we may by His grace be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thus, in private prayer, Bible reading, and self-discipline. And the third thing we're called upon to do is to bring the teaching and example of Christ into our everyday life.

[14:40] and there is so much coming into our everyday life all the time from so many sources that we have to set our minds on opening the door to the Savior who knocks and asks that He may come in and sup with us and that we might bring His example so that just as we become like the friends we spend time with, Christ is the one whom we entertain, to whom we offer the hospitality of our hearts and our life together as a congregation so that His example and His teaching might begin to find expression through our lives.

And the fourth thing is the boldness of our spoken witness to Christ. And it's increasingly difficult in our culture and in our society, in the language we use and in the way we relate to make any acknowledgement of Christ, let alone to bear bold witness to Him.

Boldness is something which we see a lot of in our society, the boldness of those who are unmistakably the servants of Satan.

sin. And we need to be bold about our Master, the one whom we serve, and the one to whom we are to bear witness.

You see, when it says that, it doesn't mean that you're to go out and judge the world in the name of Christ and condemn it, it means only that you are to bear witness to Christ on the basis of what you personally know of Him.

[16:34] And only as you come to know Him and bear witness to Him are you bearing witness to Christ. Christ. Well, the next one is personal service to church and community.

And I don't want to say anything about that. I mean, you can understand that as well as I do. Not just to the church, but to the church and the community.

To the church in love for Christ, to the community in love for the world that He has died for. And finally there is the offering of money.

And this is our commitment Sunday. And you are asked in the letter that you will have received this week to commit your offerings for the next year for the work and ministry of the church.

And that's what we're asked to do. And it's only because I'm telling you that's what you need to do.

[17:48] But it's so difficult because it's hard to talk about and it's exceedingly hard to listen to somebody telling you that.

God, but I want you to review in your minds that nobody's going to tell you what to do with your money. But the gospel of Luke tells us a lot about people who did the wrong thing with their money. and he tells about the rich fool who tore down his barns and built greater. He tells about Dives and Lazarus who fared sumptuously every day and forgot the beggar at his gate.

He tells about the prodigal son who took his money and tried to build his life on it. He tells about the terrible older brother who never understood the wealth that belonged to him.

tells about the stewardship of the talents. He tells about the unjust steward. He tells about Judas and the bag of money that he received for betraying Christ.

[18:57] He tells about the widow who went to the temple and made the offering of all that she had. So the potential for us to do the wrong thing with our money is very great indeed.

And so I don't apologize telling you to consider the offering of money according to your means, the work of the church at home and overseas.

Because of the sinfulness of our world, all these commands, all these, and it says you should from time to time do this. Because if you come under a rule or under some legal mandate, that's not the same as being taught by Christ.

Christ. And all these things can be fouled up. Your worship can become idolatrous. You can attend communion and eat and drink the body and blood of Christ unworthily.

You can, in your private prayer, resort to praying to yourself like the Pharisee. You can read the Bible with blind eyes, only seeing what you want to see. You can impose self-discipline after the manner of Colossians chapter 2, which is entirely inappropriate.

[20:16] You can take the teaching and example of Christ and hear them expounded by false teachers. Your bold and spoken witness can be to the wrong end as a judge of people rather than someone who wants to share the good news of the gospel.

Your personal service to church and community can be motivated in the wrong way. Like the elder brother or like Martha.

In Luke 10, the offering of your money can be occasion of great pride and self-sufficiency, preferably with a trumpet to announce your gifts as Christ belittled in the Sermon on the Mount.

God. But all of this is only in order that three things might happen. Is that you might find in the turbulence and restlessness of your life, and I tell you this because it is my own deep longing to find stillness in the turbulence and restlessness of my own life, that we might find stillness, which is God's command and therefore must be God's gift.

That we may find a profound assurance that the Lord of hosts is with us. You know, that the triumph of the truth of the gospel will be known to all nations and through all the earth.

[21 : 57] And Jesus Christ, our Lord, will be exalted to the heavens. That we will know that. And thirdly, that we will find in God, the God of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only refuge there is.

Absolutely the only refuge there is. There is no other. God and probably the greatest difficulty for this congregation is that we have found very comfortable refuge in the circumstances of our lives, for a season at least.

But ultimately, God in his mercy and his love will drive you and me to the place where we recognize that there is no other refuge except in him, the God of Jacob.

Well, it's been a long time since you had a chance to kneel and pray in church. And so I ask you, if you would now, just to be quiet and kneel as we have our intercessions together.

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