

God's Faithfulness

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[0 : 00] As God's people, we are a praying people, I hope. I'm sure we all come prayerfully as we approach God, and especially as we approach a communion season.

We're looking to God and seeking his blessing in our lives, in our congregation, in our community, and far and wide that God would come in a day of his power, in a day of his reviving power. But as you approach God yourself, what is it that you're asking of God? What are you asking or want from him in terms of your own life, perhaps? Is there particular prayers you have at this time? Are you thankful for the way maybe you can look back and see how God has answered prayer in the past? Do you come to God expectantly then as you pray now, knowing that he has been faithful and that he promises to be faithful to hear his people?

Prayer is a wonderful privilege, and as we heard in the prayers this evening, it's not something that we are to take for granted. Even the meeting, our meeting here this evening and over these coming days, it is not something that we are to take for granted at all, but to truly give thanks to God for the wonderful privilege and the wonderful blessing of having his word and the opportunity to meet.

[1 : 20] Psalm 40, we know so well, when we sing it so often, I waited for the Lord my God. There's a sense of expectation in that psalm.

And in verse 5, the psalmist says, O Lord my God, full many are the wonders thou hast done. Thy gracious thoughts to us were far above all thoughts are gone.

There's a sense of wonder and amazement there with God at the great things that he has done.

They cannot be numbered, the things that God has done for his people.

But as we come to God's word, it gives us a focus on a sense of thankfulness for all that God has indeed done for us. Are you a person who keeps a diary?

There are some people who enjoy keeping a diary on a daily basis. Maybe write what you've done, things you've seen, things you've heard in a diary on a daily basis.

[2 : 20] Other people, it's maybe just some sketchy notes from time to time of something important, something major happens. Or for others, it's maybe let's just make sure we get the important dates in so we remember anniversaries and birthdays and things like that.

But we all have a sense of looking at the past and looking at the future in a sense of keeping a diary for ourselves, remembering things and looking forward to things.

There are often dates that we have marked and perhaps one of the dates that's maybe ingrained in your mind is the fourth Sunday of August. What's the significance of that?

You might say, well, I'm sure many of you know the significance of that date is the date set aside for the communion season here in Stornoway, the fourth Sunday in August.

But then as we think back over these last couple of years, perhaps that's kind of gone out of our focus. The fourth Sunday in August, the last couple of years, hasn't had the same significance.

[3 : 26] We've been hindered in being able to meet and especially to meet in terms of taking communion together. But we pray that we're coming through that time, that we're moving forward.

But we also look back and we ask questions like, what have we learned in that time? What have we learned about ourselves? What have we learned about others?

What have we learned about the world in which we live? We've probably learned a lot in terms of ourselves. Maybe we think to ourselves, how much was I taking for granted in my life?

Was I just struggling along slowly, wondering just what was it all about? And all of a sudden, when things came to a shuddering halt, begin to ask yourselves more serious questions.

Was I obedient to God? Did I really show my love of God? Did I show my love for my fellow Christians, my brothers and sisters in Christ? Was my urgency with the gospel what it should have been?

[4 : 31] And perhaps for a time, we were shaken up to that end. But then as we come back to normal, we can easily lose that focus once again, lose that edge. We ask ourselves too and at all,

what have we learned of God?

Have you learned more deeply the importance of your relationship with God? On a personal level, we've maybe learned just how much we need him, how much we depend on him, but also how much we can rely on him, that he is a faithful God.

Collectively as God's people, hopefully we've learned how much we long for fellowship with each other, how much we long for God's word, how much we long to remember the Lord's death till he come.

Nationally, what have we learned? And internationally, what have we learned? Perhaps we've learned just how far from God we had gone, maybe have still gone.

There's no thought of God in the midst of it all. But as we move forward, we long to see as God's people, his blessing upon us, to learn lessons and to seek his blessing on us as a people, as a congregation and indeed as nations of the world.

[5 : 51] The city of Glasgow perhaps reflects so much of our nation. You may be familiar with Glasgow, many of you sure are very familiar with it, but they have a coat of arms for the city with a motto on it.

And the motto now reads, let Glasgow flourish. But that's not always been the motto. Some of you I'm sure know what it once was, that back in the year 1631, the motto of Glasgow was formed and the words were this, let Glasgow flourish through the preaching of thy word and the praising of thy name.

That was the motto of Glasgow for over 200 years. And indeed our nation knew a time of blessing over those years too. But in 1866, the last part of the motto was dropped and it became, let Glasgow flourish.

But no answer as to how. And what's interesting about it is when you look on the council website, the city council website, when they speak about the motto and how it changed, it says the new motto is a curtailment of the text inscribed on the bell of the Tron church cast in 1631.

They mean a shortened version. But I think what they've said says so much, it's a curtailment.

They're curtailing the way Glasgow or anywhere is going to flourish.

[7 : 32] Dropping the part that is going to flourish by the preaching of thy word is so definitive in many ways, so enlightening in many ways.

But as we turn to this psalm, what we find is the psalm is giving us a reminder of how we can be revived, of how we can know God's blessing.

Verse 12, for example, is a very famous verse itself. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.

It reminds us of where that motto for Glasgow once came from. It was looking to God and seeking blessing through the preaching of the word.

Recognizing his steadfast love, an unchanging love from God, a God who is able to bless if only we would seek him.

[8 : 39] And so as we prayerfully approach this communion weekend, as we seek God's blessing on us, are we thankful? Are we praising him as we should?

And are we seeking the blessing of God on us? Are we encouraged? Are we looking forward in anticipation? Are we hungry for the word and for the sacrament?

God's word is what will stir us up as we approach the sacrament on the Lord's day. Through the preaching of his word, may we all be blessed and encouraged together over these days and to show our love for God and coming to remember his death together, to remember what he has done for us.

And there's three things I want us to take from this psalm tonight. Three ways that we can see encouragement for ourselves as we approach this time. And the first thing is this, we see God's word and the blessing that there is in it.

The second thing we see is God's will and the wonder of it. And the third thing is God's worth and that nothing compares.

[9 : 53] So the first thing we have is God's word and the blessing of it. Psalm 33 is, as you begin in the beginning of the psalm, shout for joy in the Lord.

In many ways, our joy was hindered. And has been hindered over the last while. We haven't felt maybe able to shout properly with joy in the Lord.

But when God comes and revives his people, we cannot but help but to shout for joy in the Lord. And that is the foremost, what's foremost in this psalm, is a psalm of praise.

And the praise comes when we see and know who God is. When we show our dependence upon him and we see that he is in control of all things.

And when he shows his steadfast love continually towards his people in whatever circumstances we are, how God shows his steadfast love, his faithful, unchanging love.

[11 : 01] And that again is a great reminder to us and something we have to remind ourselves of time and time again. Our God reigns. He hasn't changed his position.

He is where he's always been, overruling in all things. And the psalmist here in Psalm 33 is showing us that we have every reason to praise God.

It's linked closely to Psalm 32, the previous one as well. What you see as you read through Psalm 32, it's a psalm that speaks of the Lord being praised because he is the one who forgives sin.

He is the one who forgives sin. When we acknowledge our sin before him, he is able to forgive. And as we know the forgiveness of God, we praise his name.

And as we come into Psalm 33, the praise almost increases. The praise just goes on. Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous. Praise befits the upright.

[12 : 08] Give thanks to the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord. One commentator describes Psalm 33 as God blowing over the coals of our heart so that they will catch fire with worship and praise.

God blowing over the coals of our hearts so they will catch fire with worship and praise. Something we used to do which is not as common now is banking the stove.

I'm sure many of you have done it maybe still do. You bank the stove at night bank it up so that hopefully in the morning there'll be something that you can put more peat or coal onto and it's just going to fan itself into flame once again instead of letting the fire die out you keep it bank bank to keep the embers burning.

And maybe in some ways these last couple of years it's almost like our hearts have just been banked dampened down in some ways. Yes there's a flame in there but it's down somewhere deep and it needs fanning into flame.

once again and maybe we still feel a bit like that too but what the crucial thing is is that the fire is there and also we have the spirit of God and his word to blow over our hearts and to fan us into flame once again.

[13 : 44] In verse four here we read the word of the Lord is upright. The word of the Lord is precious. It is what we need. And the more we come into God's word and the more we see the steadfast love of God and come to give him praise the more our hearts are fanned into flame once again.

You remember the two on the road to Emmaus after the crucifixion of Christ. There they met with the Lord on the way and what was it that happened? Their hearts burned within them.

How? As the Lord opened up the scriptures to them. What God was the Lord was teaching them through the Old Testament and through this teaching and through what had happened in these days he fanned them into flame and they were burning then for the Lord to go and meet with others.

And that is our prayer as we approach God's word over this season. As we hear the preaching of God's word over these days that the word we bless to all our hearts.

That it would rekindle the fires in our hearts. Our love for the Lord, our love for each other, our love for fellowship, our love in all senses towards God.

[15 : 03] The word of God is what we need. The word of Lord is upright as it says here. The word is like a compass that guides his people.

And that is what we need. All around us we see the result of abandoning God's word. Of abandoning like the city of Glasgow that motto through the preaching of thy word.

When we abandon God's word, where do we go? We've got no direction. Our society is just cast adrift. We're rudderless. We don't have any steering at all.

We're heading in the wrong direction. God's word to help us flourish. We need God's word and we have the privilege of it before us here.

And through the preaching of God's word over this weekend and week after week and hearing it and reading it and sharing it together, may we be stirred up in our faith.

[16 : 05] God's word as we see and so often reminds us of the dangers of just drifting away from it, neglecting it, turning away from it.

What does it lead to? There's immorality, wickedness, evil in this world beyond what we could comprehend, beyond what we might think is possible.

There is wickedness all around us. But what we need again is God's word. and the blessing of it. We can trust this word.

It is a word that is powerful. It is by the word of the Lord the heavens were made and the breath of his mouth all their host. He did all through his word.

And it says there in verse 8, let all the earth fear the Lord, let the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. May we stand in awe of him.

[17 : 06] He is our God, he is our Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He is a great God who is in control of all things.

So pray for the preaching of the word over these days. Pray that will fan us all into flame for the Lord, encouraging our hearts, reminding us that God is in control.

The second thing we see here is God's will. God, as he says here, the psalmist, is in control.

Now, what have we learned of God's will in our own lives? Even over these last few years, what have we learned of God's will?

Maybe we've questioned it. We often end up in situations where we question God what he is doing, why he might be doing it. We often have these questions, but so does the psalmist.

[18 : 10] We see him in other psalms questioning, for example, how long, oh Lord? Why, oh Lord? He has these very same questions, but again and again, we see him coming back and recognizing that God's will is what we need.

His will is dominant as you see in verse 10. The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. He frustrates the plans of the people.

We all make plans. We've all had plans. We've all maybe had plans that have been cast into disarray in these last couple of years. Things we've had to postpone or put off.

Our plans have often had to change, but God's plan hasn't changed. God's will hasn't changed.

God, looking down on us as a people, as nations of the world, recognized how far away we were going from him, and he has brought this upon us to bring us back.

But have we listened? Job in the Old Testament says in chapter 37, verse 5, God thunders wondrously with his voice.

[19 : 21] He does great things that we cannot comprehend. For to the snow, he says, fall on the earth. Likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour.

Everything is within God's grasp, within God's control. The snow, the downpour of rain, the wind, everything that happens, his will is dominant.

His will will have the final word, his will be done. Psalm 115, another psalm says, but our God is in the heavens.

He has done whatsoever he hath pleased. God is in control. We need not fear because God is in control of all things.

And our greatest reminder of this is as we look to the Lord Jesus Christ. as a world looked on as he was crucified, they wondered what was happening.

[20 : 25] The disciples themselves were questioning what is going on here. As we look to the cross, our initial reaction would be, but why God?

Why this? Why did he have to die for our sins? Because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. God's will, God's way, God's way to salvation, prepared for his people.

Jesus himself prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, not my will, but yours be done. May these days teach us not to look to ourselves and to our own plans, but to seek the will of God in all things, to be reconciled to the will of God, to pray, Lord, your will be done, but to pray, Lord, bless and pity us.

Verse 11 shows us that his will is determined. The things that occur in this world, while they're all parts of God's plan for the ages, nothing takes place apart from his divine plan.

The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. It's not something that often sits comfortable with people in our day.

[21 : 54] When we struggle and find it hard, we want to be in control. We want to think that our way is best, but the counsel of the Lord stands forever.

Is that the way you see your life playing out just now? Is that the way we see our nation playing out just now? If it isn't, we may feel scared of what's happening.

But the truth is, we need to remember that God is in control. God knows. And isn't it more reason to rejoice and to be able to praise God, to know that he is with us, to know that he will guide us and help us.

As verse 12 says, blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. the people whom he has chosen as his heritage. You are blessed to know God.

You are blessed if you are one of his chosen people. When you love the Lord, you are blessed. And blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

[23 : 04] There is so much in God's will, but the greatest thing is this, it is what we are to desire. desire. It is what we are to desire. The nation is blessed whose God is the Lord.

And when we think of Glasgow's motto, it took in 1631. When you think of how Glasgow flourished, it was a small fishing village back in those days in the banks of the River Clyde, and how it grew into a thriving industrial city, famous throughout the world for shipbuilding, Clyde built was a word that spoke about quality, things that would last.

The city became known as the second city of the British Empire, such was prosperity and power in those days. Where is it now? Where is our nation now?

When we ask ourselves these questions and we think of dropping the motto and just saying, let Glasgow flourish, but there's no answer. How? Where do we go?

Except the Lord build the house, the builders build in vain. We are to return to the Lord. We have abandoned God, but God calls his people back.

[24 : 25] Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. We need to long for and ask God for his blessing on us. that his will be done, that we see his blessing.

Like Psalm 67, like Psalm 85, like the Psalm itself says, we are to pray for God to revive us, to restore us, to rebuild us, to bring us back to himself.

Psalm 85, in times past, Lord, you showed favor to your own beloved land. God, your Savior, now restore us, is the cry of the Psalms.

will you not again revive us, that we may rejoice in you. God's will is desirable. It is what is best for us, because God knows best.

So may his word fan our flames, may his will, may we remind ourselves that he is in control, that his counsel stands forever, that we would seek his blessing.

[25 : 30] then thirdly, and finally, we are reminded here of too, how God watches over us, and how God is so worthy of all our praise.

The Psalm closes with the assurance of the worth of God. And when you look at Psalm verse 13, down to the end, it very much speaks about how the Lord is looking on his people.

The Lord looks down from heaven. He sees the children of man, it says in verse 13. And in verse 18, behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love. His eyes are on his people. He knows our every need. He knows our every thought. He knows every motive of our heart. He knows everything there is to know.

nothing is hidden from him. And who is comfortable with that? It's a sobering thought. As the children of God, that should be a great comfort to us.

[26 : 43] He sees all the children of man. He sees everyone. Those who are sitting on thrones, those who are in positions of power, those who are kings, who are trusting in their armies, the warrior who thinks he'll be delivered by his great strength.

All of these he sees. But they're not going to be saved in those ways. Because verse 18 says, behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, whose hope is in his steadfast love.

He is watching, and he is waiting for his people. He loves his people. He longs for his people to find peace with him and is watching.

He is aware of everything. God watches from heaven. He sees people making their plans. He sees the disarray they often end up in.

He sees their efforts to find their own way to salvation. And sometimes we might think he forgets us, but he never does.

[27 : 55] He sees it all. One day he is going to judge the wicked, and he is going to judge the just according to their works.

He looks down and sees it all, and we can take great comfort in that. The eye of the Lord is upon us. And as well as being aware of everything that goes on, he is watching with affection.

I think that's what the psalmist is saying to us here as well. He is watching his people with such great affection. His eye is on those who fear him, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.

He's showing his affection towards his people. When you look around the congregation in these days, there are a few newlyweds in our midst.

There are a few oldieweds in our midst as well. When you see newlyweds, they often look at each other with that sense of longing, that sense of love.

[29 : 05] Thankfully, as we grow older, hopefully that affection still stays. You have that look of love towards the one you love. Well, God is here reminding us of his affection towards us, the way he looks upon us in his steadfast love, a love that never grows cold, a love that never diminishes, a love that is fixed on his children.

Our God looks down on us with that love. And when you think of the way the Lord Jesus speaks, in his high priestly prayer in John 17, or on the cross, he speaks with such love and affection that we might know this love for ourselves.

So the Lord looks down in love on us. The question tonight as we conclude is, how do we look on him?

Is our love a reciprocation of his love to us? We can say, as John says, we love because he first loved us.

But are we showing that love? Do we love him with all our hearts? The psalmist here says, our soul waits for the Lord.

[30 : 38] He is our help and our shield. But our heart is glad in him because we trust in his holy name. Is that your love tonight?

As we look ahead to these days, to hearing his word preached, to knowing his will is done, to knowing that he is watching us with such love, are we reciprocating that love?

I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did hear. That's what the psalmist says in Psalm 116.

May that be our love too, that we love him with all our heart and that we will come and show that love by coming to the Lord's table, by professing his name and by showing forth his death until he come.

And as the psalm concludes, may that be our prayer too. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us even as we hope in you.

[31 : 53] May we hope in him with all our heart and look longingly to him as we seek his blessing and his favour upon us.

May God bless his word to us. We're going to sing in conclusion some of these verses from the song.