

Sunday Service 22 March 2020

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Date: 24 March 2020

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Welcome to this live stream. This is like no other Lord's Day we have known, and yet it is the Lord's Day. And so we come together today in many homes joined together by the wonders of technology, but also by the greater wonder of God's grace and spirit.

If you're joining us from outwith Stornoway Free Church, we're delighted that you've chosen to do this, and we pray that you will be blessed. Now let's pray together. Before we read from Scripture. Almighty God, we thank you for this opportunity of sharing together around your word, of sharing together in worship, of coming together in such a way as we have never done before.

And yet we give thanks that you're aware of each of us, and of all that binds us together in the fellowship of the gospel. We thank you today, O Lord, for all that you are to us, for all you promised yet to be to us, for all you have been to your people in the past.

We thank you for the way that your word brings to us so many circumstances in which your people were set in difficulties and trials and afflictions.

[1 : 12] We thank you for the many promises you gave them, for the way that you use such times of confinement and affliction to better their lives, to reveal yourself through them.

And to show them that the future for them was indeed blessed. We pray today that you'd bless each of us here who are listening to this live stream and watching.

We pray that you'd bless all who likewise share together in such ways throughout the nation, even throughout the world today. We thank you for your church, O Lord, and that we are bound together in the Spirit of God in such a way as cannot in any way be separated from you.

And so we ask that you would continue to bless us now and bless your word to us especially. Look upon us in your mercy as a nation, as we bring before you the circumstances of this time.

Lord, our God, we know that we have sinned against you. We know that we are undeserving of any mercy from you. But we pray that you would turn to us and hear us in our affliction.

[2 : 22] And show to us, Lord, that you are indeed kind and generous and gracious and that you remember your covenant mercies and promises. We pray today for our people. We ask that you would bestow upon us, O Lord, a sense of our own need and a sense of how we need you especially.

We pray that you would enable us, Lord, in turning to you to realise once again the benefit we have of this great God being the God of his covenant, the God of his church, the God and Lord of heaven and earth.

And it is to you today that we cry. For you alone, O Lord, can turn the tide of evil and sin that has marked us for too long.

We pray today for those in government over us. We ask that you bless them. We pray that you would give to them, Lord, to know the way through these difficulties. Uphold them, we pray.

Shield them, we pray, from all that would afflict them too in this plague. Grant that you would keep them safe so that they may be able to lead the nation and lead us through by your guidance to better times.

[3 : 32] We pray that you'd continue, Lord, to bless those who have this affliction at this time, who have the virus already. We ask that you bless them and bless their families.

We pray for those nations of the world, including our own, where families have lost loved ones and mourn over such an increase in death in Italy, China and other places in the world.

Lord, continue, we pray, to look upon us in your favour and grant to us these mercies, we pray, as we ask it all with the pardon of our sin. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Now, reading today is from the prophecy of Jeremiah. And if you turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 33 and verses 1 to 11.

Jeremiah 33 verses 1 to 11. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while it was still and shut up in the court of the guard.

[4 : 35] Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is his name. Call to me, and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down, to make a defence against the siege mounds and against the sword.

They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans, and to fill them with the dead bodies of men whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath. For I have hidden my face from this city because of all their evil.

Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first.

I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth, who shall hear of all the good that I do for them.

[5 : 47] They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. Thus says the Lord, in this place of which you say it is a waste without man or beast.

In the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing as they bring offerings to the house of the Lord.

Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord.

We pray that God will add his blessing as we read his word again. Now let me say a word at this moment to the children. When Roscoe was a young puppy, while we were still in Garibust, he wandered away one afternoon and was nowhere to be found.

We went looking for him down to the shore, neighbouring crafts, up through the village, but no sign of him. Night time came, still no sign of him.

[7 : 04] We were sure something must have happened to him, especially when he was so young. We spent the night thinking about him, hoping he was safe. So next morning, as we set off down the main road to look for him again, suddenly we saw him, and he saw the car.

And he came running towards us, and we lifted him into the safety of the car. Today, you are away from church, from tweenies, from Sunday school.

Not because you want to be, but because this is what we must do for a while to keep safe from this dangerous virus. But you are not away from God.

He is always thinking about us. He never forgets us. He is our Father in heaven. So, let's say the Lord's Prayer, together now, wherever you are with the children.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

[8 : 07] Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debt, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen. Let's think for a little moment now of Jeremiah 33.

I mentioned this passage from Jeremiah 33 in my printed message a couple of days ago. And this morning, I'd like to look at it in a little more detail.

Jeremiah, for good reason, came to be known as the Weeping Prophet. He had much to weep about in his day, for the Lord was about to bring a catastrophe upon the people in response to their wickedness.

They would be carried into exile in Babylon, and their temple would be ruined, and they would be unable to worship as before. And Jeremiah suffered more than once for pointing out the truth, and for warning about the future as God revealed it to him.

[9 : 18] His message was not welcomed by the king and those in power. And in this chapter, we read that he was held a prisoner under guard. What a painful burden it must have been to this man

of God to be unable to do the work to which God had called him.

And it is still the case. It's always painful for God's people when they're confined, when they're unable to get to church, as we are today. The Psalms are full of references to when the psalmist, whether David or others, were not able to get to the temple to worship at the time they used to. And being together in worship is one of the most precious blessings we have. Maybe we didn't appreciate that as much as we should have.

Very often, it's only when we lose what is precious that we realise how much we ought to have treasured it while we had it. And so, by God's mercy, by the time this is over, it may be that many in our nation who have thought loosely about church and worship will have come to realise how empty life is without it, and join us at our services or services elsewhere in other gospel churches.

Jeremiah, however, he knew that God was in this. It was God's providence. It had his purpose behind it.

[10:50] And in this passage we read of how God spoke right into his situation. This is the great thing about God. People try to close him out, and he breaks through.

His providence causes times of confinement, bewilderment, affliction. Yet he himself is never held in. He never has to watch or listen to the news to find out what's happening.

Nor does he ever worry over anything. This is why his first words to Jeremiah were not about the circumstances Jeremiah was in.

Nor was it about what would happen next, or the reason for these sufferings. No, before all of that, and even ahead of calling him to prayer, God gave Jeremiah a glimpse of his own greatness as creator and as covenant Lord.

Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is his name.

You see, God is reminding Jeremiah here that the whole creation was formed by him.

[12:03] It's a word that means shaped, crafted in divine knowledge and wisdom. And what's that got to do with things? Well, quite simply, everything that has come upon Jeremiah and his people has been sculpted by God, fashioned purposefully.

Nothing in it is accidental, or an afterthought on God's part. And that being so, the outcome also will be exactly as he planned it.

What a base that is on which to build prayer. And is it not so today for us? Of course it is.

We're not calling upon God as if he had not given much thought to this plague. We're not calling on God as if he didn't know what to do with it, or to what purpose it will serve.

So he spoke to Jeremiah and said, Call to me and I will answer you. And I will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

[13:10] This is exactly how God is calling us to pray. All of us. We're facing a crisis for which we need God's help. And to get it, we need to ask him for it.

We have seen how quickly this unseen virus brings death, closures of schools, workplaces, transport, and so on.

Affecting virtually the whole infrastructure of society, and that all over the globe. But then notice how God went on to reveal to Jeremiah the disaster he would bring on the city in which many would die. And then after that, how God's ultimate purpose was not leaving things like that, but healing and blessing when the disaster was over.

Let's just read what it says. Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of prosperity and security.

[14:19] I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.

And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and a glory before all the nations of the earth, who shall hear of all the good that I do for them.

They shall fear and tremble, because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. Thus says the Lord in this place, of which you say, It is a waste without man or beast.

In the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord.

Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at the first, says the Lord.

[15 : 34] The land, Canaan, was God's gift to Israel, their covenant inheritance, which was graced to them by the Lord.

To be removed from the land was the ultimate disgrace and disaster, for it signified the extent of the Lord's displeasure against flouting his covenant love.

And there are close connections between the situation Jeremiah faced and the situation that we face today as a nation. Yet God's mercy is great.

The future sparkled with life. Nowhere is God's love and mercy seen so clearly as against the dark background of sin. And God never tires of showing us that.

It's there all through the Bible. So let's, in this time of gloom, let's look at it for what it is. We as a people have treated God despicably and he's letting us know that he's awake to it.

[16 : 44] We can throw words back in his face, but he will have the last word. Yet we can appeal to his mercy and forgiveness for his healing, restoring, and that's what we must do.

One of the many benefits of knowing the Psalms well is that we find our counsel and comfort in them in times like these.

For every crisis, you'll find something in the Psalms that will answer to our dilemma. Psalm 2 is no exception. It's a messianic psalm.

It's a psalm that presents Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, to us in the greatness of his majesty, in the greatness of his saviourhood, in the way that he finally will be the Lord revealed, the Lord of all creation.

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

[17 : 58] He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury, saying, As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

Now therefore, O kings, be wise, be warned, O rulers of the earth, serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. And the psalm finishes with this, which is directly applicable to Jesus himself, our wonderful saviour, where it says, Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Is this not your place of refuge today? The refuge that is in Jesus himself.

We cannot run away from God. But here is the great truth of the gospel. We can run into him. We can actually come to trust in him and find our security in him.

And we need to remind people of what they do when they turn away from him. that they turn away from the God who is good, who is kind, who is merciful, who is patient, who is long-suffering, who hates sin and iniquity, and yet who loves mercy and is open to our cry as we come to him whenever that may be.

[19 : 40] Amen. And may God bless to us his word and our thoughts upon it. Now we're going to close with praise. We're going to sing Psalm 23 from the Scottish Psalter.

If you just join in the singing wherever you are. I've never done this before. I've never been involved in a live stream where we've been singing together or speaking to one another in this way.

But if we sing Psalm 23, it's always customary for us, of course, in our worship to sing psalms or sing hymns as well. Some of you will be singing hymns as well.

In any case, we're praising the Lord in Psalm 23 just now just to finish off our service. The Lord's my shepherd. I'll not want. He makes me down to lie.

In pasture green he leadeth me the quiet waters by. I was telling a funeral service just recently of a little girl who was being taught this psalm The Lord's my shepherd from the Scottish Psalter and when the Sunday school teacher asked her if she remembered it if she could recite it this is what she said The Lord's my shepherd I don't want anymore.

[20 : 57] He had she had everything in the Lord himself. The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want. The Lord's my shepherd pile on one He makes me down to lie In pasture green He leadeth me the quiet waters by My soul He doth restore again And me to walk down there Within the paths

Of righteousness Even for his own name's sake Yet though I walk In death's dark vale Yet will I fear
Not ill For thou art with me And thy rod Have staffed me Come for still My table My table Thou hast
furnished In presence Of my foes
My head Thou dost With oil Anoy And my cup And my cup Overflows Goodness And mercy All my
life Shall surely Follow me And in God's house Forevermore My dwelling place Shall be Let's now
conclude with prayer Gracious God We pray today Again that your word
Will be blessed to us And that it will Find its place In our hearts Once again Help us to dwell on it
Through this day Enable us Lord To dedicate the day to you As we always should As the Lord's day
As a day of rest As a day of contemplation And prayer And meditation And reading of your word
And worship We thank you for this time Together O Lord Through this wonderful Medium of live
stream We pray that all Who took part today Will be blessed From our participation In it together
And now may the grace Of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion
Of the Holy Spirit Be with you all Now and evermore Amen Amen Blessed is people That you We
pray that God Do not That you Thus Be with■ claw
Don't Do not Be with him Go Go Hmm From To To