

We are the Servants of the God of Heaven and Earth and We are Rebuilding

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Well, we give a very warm welcome as always to everyone today, to our service this morning, and trust that God will be with us and make himself known to us through his word being blessed.

Welcome to those who are joining us online as well, and thank you for your participation in the service with us. There are quite a number of things on the bulletin sheet today, and I'm not going to go through them all, but just to highlight one or two of them for you, there is a testimony meeting tonight at 8.30pm, that's on Zoom.

An informal time of fellowship, and we're looking forward to having Nadia MacDonald speaking, and that's for anyone to join in. Zoom details are the same as previous Sunday evenings.

A monthly prayer meeting will be tomorrow evening at 7.30. That again is on Zoom, and the prayer link with Muriel in Cambodia on Tuesday at 11am. Other meetings throughout the week, you can please just read these yourselves.

You can see the details there about the call that will be signed to Callum Murdoch-Smith, Reverend Callum Murdoch-Smith. Please read through these details carefully.

[1 : 07] It sets out what that's going to involve, and the presbytery have appointed a date for the signing of the call. That's the 20th of April, Wednesday 20th of April.

That meeting is going to be here in the church, just to give plenty of space, and that will be at 7.30pm. Now, it's important that as many people as possible sign the call in person, so we're appealing to you.

If you can at all to be there, please do make conscience of that, because one of the things the presbytery will want to see is the level of support for sending a call to Reverend Callum Murdoch-Smith.

If you can't be there, and we understand, of course, that some people cannot be present themselves in person, so there are mandate forms which are available from the elders in your district.

Just read through the details there, and if you haven't heard from your district elder by Saturday the 9th of April, well, please contact them for a mandate if you need one of those.

[2 : 09] And we pray for Mr. Smith, for his congregation too, and North Uist as these matters proceed through. Now, I'm to be on annual leave.

I'm doing a wedding on the mainland next week, and I'm building a few days' holiday around that, so I'll be away for two Lord's Days, and you can find the details on the bulletin sheet each week, as usual.

Thank you from the Women for Mission. The last week's spring stall amounted to £930, and that was distributed between Safe Families Scotland, Lacknadon Christian Hospital India, and Damaris Community House in Greece.

And finally, the WFM Ladies' annual event is due to take place, God willing, on 20th of May. That's in the Caber Fé Hotel. Really looking forward to this after the COVID period has caused that that be not available for the last couple of years.

So if you, there are booking forms now available. You can get these from Lizzie or from Donna. The details are there. And you need a booking form for the event, and they need to be in by 30th of April.

[3 : 19] So please just read through that as well. Well, let's worship God now. We're singing firstly to His praise in Psalm 113. Psalm 113 in the Scottish Psalter.

That's page 393. Praise God, you servants of the Lord.

O praise the Lord's name, praise. Yea, blessed be the name of God from this time forth always.
From rising sun to where it's set, God's name is to be praised.

Above all nations, God is high. Above heavens, His glory raised. Verses 1 to 8. Well, we'll sing the whole of the psalm. There's no point leaving out one verse. So if we sing the whole of the psalm.
Praise God, you servants of the Lord. Praise God, ye servants of the Lord.

[4 : 19] O praise the Lord's name, praise. Praise God, ye blessed be the name of God from this time forth always.

Praise God, ye blessed be the name of God from this time forth. From rising sun to where it's set, God's name is to be praised.

above all nations, God is high. above heavens, His glory raised.

Unto the Lord, a God that dwells on high, who can come here, himself that humble things to see, in heaven and earth that are.

He from the dust afflicts the good, that very Lord a fly, and from the down lives the man, O Christ with poverty, that he may highly him advance, and with the princes say, with those that of his people are, the chief in princes great.

[6 : 49] The burden woman has to keep, he may get unto thee.

Of sons of heaven, full of joy, praise to the Lord give ye.

Now let's join together in prayer, let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Our gracious and eternal God, we give thanks to you today as we gather here in your presence, that you are the God who lifts us up out of the dungle of our sin, and sets us in your own family to be in that special relationship with you, where you have become our Father, where through the Lord Jesus Christ you are pleased to receive us, and adopt us into your family.

And we thank you today for the privilege we have once again, of being able to gather here in worship. Lord, help us to prize it highly. Help us truly today to realize the privilege that is ours, and the honor you have bestowed upon us, that we are able to come in this way together to worship the Lord God.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to reflect upon where we would be, if it were not that your grace reached us, and plucked us out of the dunghill and the darkness of sin, and brought us into your own marvelous light.

[8 : 35] And we thank you today, Lord, for all that that means to your people, and for the way in which they know you have set them on that course that is heavenwards. We come today with our adoration of you and our thanksgiving to you, for you are God and there is none like you.

And we thank you today that you are set above all that you have created, as the sovereign creator, the redeemer of your people, the king and head of your church.

Bless us, we pray, Lord, under your word today. We thank you that your word once again brings us that revelation of yourself and the teaching that you have given to us in it, with regard to yourself and regard to ourselves, to the world in which we live, to things past and present and future, even to the things of eternity.

Lord, we thank you today that your word is so reliable for us, a word that we can trust, a word that we can commend to others as trustworthy, a word that has been proved to be the word of God down through the centuries and millennia of human life.

And we thank you, Lord, that you have brought it to us in its completeness, as we find it in its written form in our Bibles. Help us, Lord, we pray as we turn to your word today, to do so in dependence upon your Holy Spirit, for we cannot ourselves understand the spiritual things of God, of his kingdom, without your own spirit opening our hearts and our understanding and giving us that enlightened mind in the knowledge of yourself.

[10 : 12] We pray today that your Holy Spirit will work mightily in our hearts. Help us, we pray, both in preaching and hearing your word, that we may find it an experience of a demonstration and power of your spirit as we come under your word and its teaching.

We thank you for everyone here today, young and old, we bless you, O Lord, for the way that you are a God to us and to our families, as you have promised to be in covenant.

And we thank you that whatever our age may be today, whatever our circumstances in life may be, whatever we may be able to reflect upon and think upon of our past, of our present situation, Lord, help us, we pray, to carry all of this before you into prayer and seek that you would be our God.

Lord, we pray today that all who come acknowledging you as their God will come to have that relationship confirmed and assured of their relation with you, that they may go on in the confidence of faith.

Forgive us, we pray too, for we come confessing our sin today. Lord, we confess our sin every time we come into your presence, whether together collectively, in public or privately, we always know that we have sin to confess.

[11 : 33] We do confess our sin and ask, O Lord, today for your forgiveness and for your cleansing and for your empowering of us so that we may take further steps away from the ways of sin into the path of holiness.

Forgive us, we pray, for our sinful lapses, for the times when we go astray into worldliness and to practices that we know are not in accord with your truth, whether mentally or in our practice or in our words.

Lord, forgive us, for we sin against you daily in thought and in word and in practice. Forgive us, we pray, for our lack, our lack of zeal, our lack of commitment. Forgive us, for, Lord, our failures in every respect to meet the standard that you set out for us in your word and in the primary example we have in the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

O bless us, we pray today, and grant to us that our hearts may be established in your ways and in your truth. And garrison us, we pray, in the days ahead with your peace as our guardian in our souls.

We ask today for your blessing for those who are ill. We think of our number, Lord, and ask that you'd bless those unable to be here because of illness in themselves or in their homes or families.

[12 : 52] Bless, we pray, any who are seriously ill and who may be approaching the borders of death, of leaving this world. We pray for them. We ask that you prepare them, Lord, for that great step so that they may be made ready to face you and to meet you in such a way as you will approve of them through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

O sanctify, we pray, this time to them. And we pray that such may be true of all of us, for we never know when our last day on earth might be. And we pray that you would bless today those who are unable to carry out their duties and functions as they used to through infirmity and old age and through the loss of certain senses and certain capacities that they once had.

Remember our care homes, Lord, at this time when we know that an increase in the COVID infection has reached our local care homes. Again, we pray for them and for their staff.

We ask that you'd bless all residents and bless those who care for them. Lord, guide us, we pray, through this time of pandemic that still remains with us. We look to you, O Lord, and ask that you would continue to protect and watch over us and keep us from death, we pray.

We ask, O Lord, that all the measures taken will be successful in dealing with the virus in whatever way that requires to be done. We ask for our governments, again, that pray that you would give them wisdom.

[14 : 25] We pray that you would give them, Lord, to rule in the wisdom that your word brings to us and commend to us the wisdom of being in Christ, the wisdom of trusting in you and embracing your word and your laws.

Lord, receive our thanks, we pray, for all that you are to us. And be with the troubled nations of the world today, whether it's war and famine and poverty. Again, we pray for Yemen, for those we know in various parts of the world that are facing persecution.

We pray that you'd grant blessing, Lord, also to Ukraine as they continue to deal with their difficult and tragic situation. Lord, remember them in your mercy and grant once again to stay the hand of the oppressor and the aggressor.

Lord, we ask that you would bring cessation to the war and to the violence and to the loss of life. And so continue to bless us here in our own community.

Once again, we commend to you, Lord, those who look after our young in schools and in Sunday school and bless our children at this time as they spend time on holiday.

[15 : 34] Give them, Lord, your own protective care and bless to them the teaching they receive, especially the things of the gospel. Bless those who are preparing for camps later on in the summer.

We ask for all those who have applied, oh, Lord, that you would bless that to them. Bless those who have given their time as leaders and bless our own Marianne as she anticipates leading a camp for

the first time.

We pray that you bless her in her preparation and as she still looks for a male leader to help with the work of camp. We pray that you will provide that for her, oh, Lord. And for all other camps, we ask your blessing.

We ask for your protective care. We ask for your guidance. We ask for thankful hearts that we have such a facility once again available to us. And so receive us now, we pray.

Guide us in our thoughts and help us in speaking and hearing to have your glory foremost in our minds. We ask it all for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, our two children.

[16:34] It's great to see children out again today. I know it's been difficult for you as well in schools and when we've had to stop some of our meetings due to the COVID situation.

So it's great to see you all and it's wonderful to have so many young faces once again present in person. You know what this is? It's a wee biscuit.

Anybody know what it's called? What are they called? They're called party rings. Party rings, you probably had them if you had parties. You have had parties, I'm sure. Well, these party rings are very tasty and our Roscoe loves them.

It's not often you can actually eat foods that dogs like. It's not often you can use a doggy treat and eat it yourself but this is one of them. They're not made for dogs.

They're made for people but sometimes dogs like them as well. And this is one of Roscoe's favourites, these party treats. And they're held in a biscuit tin in our kitchen and the tin has got one of those lids that you can clamp down to keep things fresh.

[17:45] And it makes a bit of a noise when you open it. And you know if Roscoe's even through in the next room having a doze, sleeping there on his blanket and he hears the noise of the tin being opened, he'll shoot through into the kitchen because he knows it's party ring time.

It's treats time. So he shoots off through here and waits until the party ring. And very often in the morning when I go up to the study, if I come down for a coffee and he then gets up, he's quite late getting up and if he hears the party ring, I'll take one out and take it with me up to the study.

And he'll follow me all excitedly all the way upstairs until he actually gets to the chair in the study where he usually sleeps while I'm busy at the desk. So party rings for Roscoe.

He likes these treats. Now we should be like that in our lives as well with regard to the things that God gives us as special treats.

And one of the most special treats is his own word, the Bible. That's why we're here today because we're taking this treat that God has given us that's good for us because we know how important it is to know the Bible, to study the Bible, to have a hunger for the teaching of the Bible.

[19:00] In the Psalms, in Psalm 19, remember how David there in the Psalm 19 was talking about the word of God and he talks in the various ways in which the word of God was so precious to him.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. And he goes on to speak about what the word actually does. And he says, there are more to be desired, these words of God, there are more to be desired than gold.

They are also sweeter than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. In other words, for David, nothing was more special, apart from God himself, nothing was more special for him in this life than God's own word.

And that's why you're here today. That's why you go to Sunday school, to tweenies. That's why you learn the Bible at home, because it is spiritual food that we should be as delighted to take as Roscoe is with his party rings.

And of course, it's not just the Bible itself that's precious to us. Jesus also is our special spiritual food. And when Jesus and the salvation that's in God, that's in Jesus, that God has provided for us, when that is spoken of in the word of God, we come to church because we want our souls to be fed.

[20:20] We want our souls to be fed by this rich spiritual food, this treat that God has given us in Jesus, this salvation, this forgiveness of sins, this eternal life that God has wonderfully provided for us as the greatest treat of all.

And so today, as we come young and old to listen to God's word, to listen to what God is saying to us, let's all try together to think about Jesus as our spiritual food.

Remember, Jesus himself said in John's gospel, I am the bread of life, and he is the water of life. He is the spiritual food and water that we need.

And today, that's why we come, not only to worship him and give thanks, but to receive from him the treat that is in his eternal life and in his word so that we come to enjoy our relationship with God where he's our savior and where we are his people, his family.

So we're going to now say the Lord's Prayer together. Let's all together say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[21 : 39] Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts 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. Now we're going to read God's word and the reading today is from the book of Ezra.

The book of Ezra in chapter 5. Ezra comes after the two books of Chronicles and before the book of Job, Nehemiah, and then Job and then Psalms.

So in Ezra chapter 5, we can read from the beginning of the chapter right through to the end. Now the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

Then Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua, the son of Josedach, arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem. The prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

[22 : 53] At the same time, Tatanai, the governor of the province beyond the river, and Shethar Bosnai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus, who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?

They also asked them this, what are the names of the men who are building this building? But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.

This is a copy of the letter that Tatanai, the governor of the province beyond the river, and Shethar Bosnai and his associates, the governors who were in the province beyond the river, sent to Darius the king.

They sent him a report in which was written as follows, To Darius the king, all peace. Be it known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God.

It is being built with huge stones and timber is laid in the walls. This work was on diligently and prosperous in their hands. Then we asked those elders and spoke to them thus, who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure.

[24 : 03] We also asked them the names for your information that we might write down the names of their leaders. This was their reply to us. We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.

But because our fathers had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylon.

However, in the first year of Cyrus, king of Babylon, Cyrus, the king, made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. And the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple that was in Jerusalem and brought into the temple of Babylon, these Cyrus, the king, took out of the temple of Babylon and they were delivered to one whose name was Sheshbazar, whom he had made governor.

And he said to him, Take these vessels, go and put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site. Then this Sheshbazar came and laid the foundations of the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

And from that time until now it has been in building and it is not yet finished. Therefore, if it seems good to the king, let search be made in the royal archives there in Babylon to see whether a decree was issued by Cyrus, the king, for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem.

[25 : 38] And the king send us his pleasure in this matter. Amen. May God bless that reading of his word to us. Let's pray some further now from Psalm 47.

On page 62, Psalm 47. The tune is Warrington. We're singing the whole of the psalm, verses 1 to 9. All nations, clap your hands and shout.

Let joyful cries to God ring out. How awesome is the Lord most high, great king who rules the earth throughout. Sing the whole psalm, Psalm 47 to God's praise.

Amen. O nations, clap your hands and shout.

Let joyful cries to God ring out. How awesome is the Lord most high, that King and sing and sing
Die will which know TP.

[27 : 02] Oh, The nations filled at which her foes. In blessing Jacob, whom he loved, A heritage for
us he chose.

God has gone up with shouts of joy, The Lord amid the trumpet sound.

Sing praise, sing praise to God most high, To God our King, let praise our God.

For God is King of all the earth, Sing sounds of praise to Him alone.

God rules the nations from on high, He sits upon His holy throne.

[28 : 39] The leaders of the nations come, To yield themselves to heaven's God, To Him beyond
the shields of earth, Exalted greatly is the Lord.

I'd like us to turn together now to the passage we read in Ezra, Ezra chapter 5, And focusing
especially on verse 11, We can read from verse 9, Then we asked those elders and spoke to them
thus, Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?

We also asked them their names for your information, That we might write down the names of their
leaders. And this was their reply to us, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, And we
are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, Which a great king of Israel built and
finished.

Well, these chapters, as you find also with Nehemiah's book, Give us information about the
rebuilding that took place in Jerusalem After the Jews had returned from their time in Babylon, The
70 years that they spent there under the regime of the Babylonians.

And as they had begun building the house, You can see from verse chapter 4 onwards, They faced
some very stiff opposition, And it actually came to the point where a letter, As you see in chapter 4,
Was sent to King Artaxerxes at the time, Actually suggesting that these Jews were really out to
overthrow the government, The government of the empire, And therefore they should stop this
work, Because this really, according to what was sent to Artaxerxes, Was what they were about.

[30 : 52] So the king then ordered that the work cease. That's where you come through to the end
of chapter 4 there. The copy of the King Artaxerxes' letter, And they went in haste back to
Jerusalem, And then the work of the house that is in Jerusalem stopped, And it ceased, Until the
second reign of the king of Darius, As the king of Persia.

The Persians had overcome the Babylonians, And set up a new empire. An empire, in fact, In which
there was a lot more freedom of religion, So that the Jews could continue to rebuild the house.

But it came to an end, It came to cessation at least, To a pause, For some 10 to 12 years or so,
Until this happened, As you find in chapter 5, It began again to rebuild, And then they were

questioned again, And challenged again, And a letter was sent to the king, This time to Darius, And
they asked Darius to search the archives, The history books, Records that they had, In order to find
evidence that Darius, That Nebuchadnezzar, rather, Had actually given permission, To come and
rebuild this house in Jerusalem.

And the search was made, As you find here in chapter 5, And you then have the result of that, In
chapter 6, When the rebuilding actually began again, After this pause, And it began, And then they
finished it.

So that's really the story you find, Very interesting, Over the, Sorry, It wasn't Nebuchadnezzar, That
gave the decree to build, The house, It was actually Cyrus, After Nebuchadnezzar, Had ruled for a
while.

[32 : 37] So that was the story behind, This particular chapter, And incident, And after the
permission, Had then been given again, They restarted the work, And finished it.

But on the way there, This is how they answered, Those who challenged them. Here you find in
chapter 5, Here at verse 11, We are the servants, Of the God of heaven and earth, And we are
rebuilding the house, That was built many years ago.

Now that today for us, Is also something, Of relevance and significance, For our particular day, And
practice as well. Because that's effectively, What we are always involved with, In the church of God,
Not a physical building, A spiritual building, The building up of the kingdom of God, The building up
of that, Cause of Christ, That kingdom of Christ, That kingdom of God, In which we are all involved,
In whatever way, We are involved, As we'll see today, There's a role for each and everyone, Who
belongs to the church, To contribute to, That building or rebuilding work.

And I want to focus on these two, References that they gave, First of all, We are the servants, Of the God of heaven and earth. And secondly, What they were saying about rebuilding, And we are rebuilding, We are the servants of God, And we are rebuilding.

The first thing to ask, As we look at the reference, To being servants, Obviously, They're really testifying, To those that are challenging them, And asking the questions, They're testifying to the fact, That they're actually serving, The higher power of God, Not the emperor of Persia, Or whatever kingdom may exist, At any time on earth.

[34 : 19] This is why, They were actually doing the work, Because they regarded themselves, As servants of God, And you see, The title they give to God, We are the servants, Of the God of heaven and earth, There's nothing, That this God of heaven and earth, Does not rule over, Including what we're doing here, They're saying to them, Including the ruling of empires, The coming and going of empire, The rise and fall of empires, This is the God of heaven and earth, And we are his servants, That's their testimony, That's their response, What a magnificent response it is, They're presenting themselves, As the servants, Of this overlord, This God of all, This universal Lord, And therefore, The reason they're busy, Building this, And rebuilding the temple, Is that, They are not involved, In a political enterprise, They're not involved, In something, Merely political, Or geographical, What they're doing, Is especially a spiritual work, They are rebuilding,

The cause of God, The people of God, The covenant people of God, The house of worship, That worship the Lord, It is primarily, A spiritual enterprise, The Lord involves, Great timber, Great stones, All of that, Behind all that, Is the main purpose, To build, And rebuild, Spiritually, What had actually come, To an end, And been paused, For so many years, And this is no threat, To the Persian king, They're presenting this, As something, That they're obliged to do, That they owe, The God of heaven and earth, And given that, The king has been advised, By those who oppose, The work, That all these Jews, Are interested in, Is sedition, Or rebellion, As in the past, They suggested, They want to make it clear, This is no threat, Whatsoever, To the political regime, Of the Babylonians, Or now the Persians, Now that's what,

Applies to ourselves today, We are servants, Of the God of heaven and earth, What is the motive, For being builders, In the sense, In which spiritually, We are involved, In the building up, Of the church, And the rebuilding, Of the church, In actually constructing, If you like, A spiritual enterprise, Under the direction, Of God, Under the direction, Of his Holy Spirit, Under the direction, Of his word, And we'll see in a minute, How God actually used, The prophets, The prophets that were, Involved at the time, How they were used, In order to, Bring, Both teaching, And encouragement, And motivation, From God, To the people, And how in, In that regard, They were so, Zechariah and Haggai, You have the books, Of course, In the Old Testament, And this was the context, In which they preached, In which they acted, As prophets of the Lord, And today, That's what we're, Involved with ourselves, We have,

All of this, Around us, That threatens, If you like, To extinguish the gospel, As if that were possible, Well it's not possible, To extinguish the gospel, It might be, Possible to extinguish it, From one place or other, As it has been, In different places, In the world today, As you look out, Over what used to be, A place of worship, That's now gone, But you cannot, Extinguish the gospel, You cannot actually, Take Jesus away, From people, Even though you may, Take their freedom, Away from people, You might take, The structures away, From people, But you cannot, Take the Lord, Out of their hearts, Thankfully you cannot, Remove from their lives, The presence of God himself, The spirit of God himself, And the worship of God, And we, Are facing days, When we, Come across such ideas, That conversion, The word conversion, Which is, Such a precious term, As we take, The teaching of scripture, And apply it, To the way people's lives, Are changed, By the gospel, The way that God, Brings about a change,

For good, In our lives, And how that is challenged today, As if it were some sort, Of therapy, Which really is destructive, Or harmful, To human life, And our struggle is, In presenting, The gospel, And presenting an argument, Against these ideas, That this is no threat, To people's well-being, It's no threat, To the government, It's no threat, To anything secular, Other than the fact, That we want to establish, The kingdom of God, Under his blessing, And for a start, I think I mentioned, This last week as well, For a start, Conversion is not, A therapy, We're not engaged, In seeking, To have people's lives, Changed by God, To bring them, Under some sort of regime, That threatens them, And just removes from them, Everything that's precious, As you study the gospel, As you understand, The word of God, You understand that, Conversion as God defines it, Is a very good

thing, It's not something, We want naturally,

[39 : 23] It's something, Every one of us, I'm sure, Puts away from us, Because it challenges, Our view of life, It challenges, Our relationship to the world, And to God, And to each other, And yet we know, That once we're converted, Once God opens our eyes, Once God gives us, A new heart, And new longings, And new aspirations, It's the best thing, That ever happened to us, If I were to ask, Everyone in here today, Who knows, Of the power of God, Changing their lives, Put up your hand, If you think your conversion, Was a bad thing, No hands go up, Why is that?

Because we know, That conversion, The change that God brings about, In our lives, Is a change that delivers us, From the slavery of sin, From the darkness of sin, From the worldliness of sin, Into the wonderful light, Of the gospel, The wonderful light, Of salvation, The wonderful, Marvelous light, As Peter puts it, That God takes us into, When he takes us out, Of the darkness of sin, The darkness of our own making, We need delivered from, And the bright light, Of God's making, Is what we're delivered into, And so, You can take this in principle, And apply it, To our own world today, And you see, These people are saying, Well, We are the servants, Of the God of heaven and earth, And the challenge, That's come to us, Is not a small challenge, It's a great challenge, It's something, That really has, A lot of force behind it, But they're not afraid, To say, We actually serve, A higher power, Than any local, Or national government, And this higher power, Is the way, Is the reason, Why we're doing, What we're doing, Remember how, In the acts, Of the apostles, As well, You find, That the apostles, Were challenged, As you see, In chapter four, Of the acts, Where they came, To be challenged, For what they were teaching, What they were actually preaching, And, They saw, The boldness of Peter, And John, Especially in that passage, That they were uneducated, Common men, They were astonished, They recognized, They had been with Jesus, And seeing the man, Who was healed, Standing beside them, They had nothing to say, In opposition, But when they had commanded them, To leave the council, They conferred with one another, Saying, What shall we do to these men, For a notable miracle, Has been performed, Through them, That's evident to us all, We can't deny it, But in order, That it may spread,

No further among the people, Let us warn them, To speak no more, To anyone, In this name, In the name of Jesus, Because you see, People's lives were changed, Businesses were being affected, Idolatry was being affected, And all the businesses, That supported idolatry, Were being affected, People were being changed, They were being converted, They were turning out of the ways, Of the slavery, Of sin, And idolatry, And superstition, Into the ways of God, So they said, Let's warn them, To speak no more, To anyone, In this name, That sounds familiar, Doesn't it?

So, Peter, And John answered them, Whether it is right, In the sight of God, To listen to you, Rather than to God, You must judge, For we cannot but speak, Of what we have seen, And heard, That's how it is, Friends, With us today, We cannot but speak, What we have seen, And heard, We are, As a church of Christ, As the church of Christ, In the world, As the people who worship God, And follow God, And follow Jesus, We cannot but speak, The things which we have seen, And heard, God has laid them, On our hearts, God has told us, And taught us, The difference between, Living under the dominance, Of sin, And living under the lordship, Of Christ, And that's what the gospel, Really says to you, And to me, And that's what we seek, As a congregation, To witness to the world, That they needn't be, Afraid of conversion, That they needn't be, Afraid of Christians, That would be the best thing, That ever happened to them,

[43 : 39] I know you can't persuade them, Without the Holy Spirit, Taking that message, Of the gospel, And opening their hearts, To receive it, But we are obliged, To maintain, The integrity, Of our witness, We cannot but speak, The things which we have seen, And heard, We do it with love, We do it with tact, But it's the fact, That we are God's servants, That motivates, It's our doing of it, And our attitude, In building, As they say here, Is we are servants, Of the God, Of heaven, And earth, We're not fellow directors, With God, As if we're directors, Of this spiritual company, That the Trinity, Is God, The Father, The Son, And the Holy Spirit, We are his servants, And as servants, He is our king, We're obliged, To do this, Because he is our master, He is a good master, He's not someone, Who actually treats, His employees, Cruelly if you like, He's not someone, Who keeps from them,

What is their due, What is their right, You remember how, How Paul put this, When he wrote to the Corinthians, In chapter 6, First Corinthians, You are bought, You are not your own, He said to the Corinthians, You are bought, With a price, He's appealing to the Corinthians, To dedicate

themselves, More fully to God, Than they were doing, They had started, All cuts, Sorts of practices, Sinful, Sinful behavior, And attitudes, And he's calling, The apostle is calling, In repentance, Back to God, He says, You are bought, With a price, The price is, The ransom price, The blood of Christ, The death of Jesus, That's what it took, To bring them to God, And now he's saying, You owe this to him, Because he bought you, He paid the price, To make you his servant, And you became his servants, Willingly, And that's what motivates, You and I today, Not just as individuals, But collectively, As a congregation,

To say, We are servants, Of the God, Of heaven, And earth, And you see, As you go on reading this, You actually see, How they were doing this, How they're responding here, With humility as well, Indeed, With the spirit of penitence, He's making it plain, In verse 12, Because our fathers, Had angered the God of heaven, He gave them into the hand, Of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, The Chaldean, Who destroyed this house, And carried them away, To Babylonia, In other words, He's answering, The suggestion, That somehow, They're just involved, In sedition, Or another attempt, To overthrow the government, It was never like that, They're saying, In the first place, The reason, That they actually, Ended up in Babylon, Was because, They had disobeyed, And rebelled, Against their God, Not against the king, Of Babylon, And therefore, The God, Against whom, They had rebelled,

Gave them into the hand, Of the king of Babylon, And they're recognizing now, The greatness, Of the privilege they have, Of being back in Jerusalem, Of rebuilding the house of God, Of coming back again, To give their contribution, To the work of rebuilding, And that's what we do as well, We are servants, Of the God of heaven and earth, And we take into account, All our own failures, All that makes us also, Needy of repentance, Everything by which we say to God, As we seek to build spiritually, And add to what's there before, We actually do this, In a spirit, Of confession of our own, Our own sin, We are not better, In ourselves than anyone out there, Or those who came before us, Or those who will come after us, We all have our sin, And sins to confess, Our failures, Our lapses, But we are servants,

Of the God of heaven and earth, What is it today, What is it that motivates you, What is it that motivates you, As an individual, What is it that motivates us, As a congregation, What is it that really, Brings us to be, Involved in the work of the gospel, Not just in preaching the gospel, But being like yourselves, A congregation, A gospel congregation, The activities associated, With the church, With the gospel, What is it that motivates you in that?

[48 : 09] Isn't it this? Isn't it that you are servants, Of the God of heaven and earth? Isn't it that he is so worthy, Of you doing this? Isn't it that he has done far more, For you and for me, Than we could ever do for him?

We are servants, Of the God of heaven and earth, And we are secondly, We are rebuilding, This is why they are rebuilding, Because they are serving, The God of heaven and earth, What is it that makes, Building or rebuilding, Spiritual necessary?

Spiritual rebuilding, What is it that makes that necessary? Let's confine it to our own, To our own context, As a congregation, What is it that makes, Rebuilding necessary? What is that about? What exactly do we mean, By spiritual rebuilding? And how does that come about? What's the reason for it? Well for one thing, The work of building spiritually, Always goes on.

There is always a need, For other converts, For new converts, For new converts, The work of rebuilding, In a sense, Is never finished in this life, For the church, Because there will always be, A need, As day by day goes by, As year by year goes by, To maintain, The work of the gospel, Maintain the work, Of building, The cause of Christ, Of course, We are not saying, That we are, The builders, We are servants, Of the most high God, He ultimately, He is the builder, But he is using, The employment, Of his people, They are his workers, They are his servants, Through them, He builds his kingdom, You may have seen, I am sure you have seen, Some, Archaeological excavations, That have gone deep down, In parts of the world, At certain sites, That are of historic importance, And you can see, The different layers, That are built up, One on top of the other, Of civilizations, That actually existed,

[50 : 07] In that place, Maybe one overrun, By another, Just as you find here, Jerusalem overrun, By the Assyrians, And the Babylonians, And then the Persians, And all of these, And the Romans afterwards, All of these civilizations, Or empires, Or movements, Building layers, If you like, One on top of the other, As time goes by, As centuries go by, And you can see these layers, And you can find stuff, In each of these layers, Whether it's pottery, Or other things, That tell you, What these

people were about, And you can see from that, Well this is what happened, This is the history, Of this place, Here's the bottom layer, Try and work out, Which era that was from, And then as you come up, You see the more recent ones, All the way through, To the present day, And you can see the wonder, Of how the development, Has taken place, In these layers of building, Well that's how it is, For the church as well, In a sense, Because we are building, If you like, On the layer, Of the generation, That's gone before us, And we hope, That the generation following us, Are going to be building, On the layer,

That we are setting down, Just now, There's a constant work, Of building, And of rebuilding, A constant work, Of laying on, The previous layers, The layers, That's what you find, In your families, After all, Isn't it?

Because, Many of you here today, Will have an association, With previous Christians, In your own families, And they laid down, Their own layer, If you like, Of teaching, Of example to you, And you've come as a Christian, Now to follow, To build upon that layer, You yourself now, Are following, What they themselves, Did, And what they themselves, Witnessed to, And if you're maybe here, And you don't have, That family ancestry, You don't have, A previous generation, Of Christians, That laid down, A layer, On which you can build, Well here's your great opportunity, And here's your great privilege, To begin one for yourself, To let your family, Be the first, To lay down, This layer, On which future generations, Can build, That's what we're involved with, In following Christ, That's what we're involved with, In belonging to the church, And it's so sad, Isn't it?

Sometimes you, Not infrequently, Sadly, You come across people, Who were raised, In a Christian family, But have gone away, From the gospel, And from church, And from God, Altogether, Sometimes we come to, Sadly, The funeral of, Prominent Christians, Perhaps, Have reached an old age, And, Not speaking of anyone, In particular, But it happens, And the families, Gathered there, And have no connection, With the church, No connection with the gospel, No connection to Jesus, As far as can be known, And that's a, A hugely tragic sight, Because it means, The building stopped for them, They've just given up, They're not prepared to add, Their own contribution, To the valuable layers, That were laid down for them, And we really cannot, We cannot, Properly estimate, The privilege we have, Of being brought up, In a Christian setting,

In a Christian family, In a worshipping family, In a family that testifies, To God, And to his worth, And to his gospel, Is a massive, Massive privilege, And it's something, That sadly, So many families, Around you here in the town, And in our community, Don't actually have, Prize it, Make sure, That's something you treasure, And build on it, For yourself, And make sure, As far as possible, You pass it on, To the next generation, You can't guarantee, That any of our children, Are going to actually, Follow in our footsteps, Spiritually, But that's not, For want of trying, In our part, And here we are saying, This is what happens, In this regard as well, The work always goes on, And of course, That means that, As you very well know, We have, Deaths in every congregation, That leave gaps, And the gaps that are left, Means we need to rebuild, We need to ask, That God will bless us, Meantime, And that he will bring others, To fill the gaps,

[54 : 15] And add to the number, Of his people, Who are following him, And worshipping him, In this life, The work of rebuilding, Always goes on, In that sense, But then of course, And more directly, And more up to date, Really in a sense, Is precisely, Rebuilding after COVID, And I want to mention that, In closing, Because COVID has been, A huge challenge to us, As a church, Huge challenge to the church, Everywhere, Huge challenge to us, As a congregation, Because some of our activities, Were stopped for a while, Some of them have begun, And then had to stop again, We're rebuilding in a sense, In that way, After the devastation of COVID, And after the pandemic, Has had its own effects, Not only is that, The case that, Activities have stopped, But even as you come back, Into rebuilding, These activities again, There's a sense of frustration, Because things aren't still, At the level that you'd want, For freedom, For confidence,

For the rebuilding, To the extent that you'd want, Some have lost, Confidence, Altogether, Some are afraid, To come back out, In person, Like you are today, In church, Some, Maybe watching online, Are still hesitant, And maybe, Aren't yet confident enough, To come, And take their place, In the church building, Some sadly, Have fallen away, Altogether, And no longer follow the Lord, And no longer show an interest, In the things of God, Or of his worship, Or of his gospel, Or with his people, Now we need to rebuild, We're involved in our rebuilding, Acknowledging God's providence, Acknowledging his purpose, Whatever it might be, In bringing this pandemic to us, And there's an element there, Of self-examination, For all of us to ask ourselves, What has this to do with me?

It has a lot to do with me, A lot to do with you, As we re-examine our lives, And our relationship with God, God has sent the pandemic, For one reason, At least amongst many, I'm sure, That are known to himself, And that's so that you and I, Will ask ourselves, Where have I been in the building work?

Where have I been in the rebuilding, Of the cause of Christ? And where am I now? And what am I going to do now? And am I going to keep withholding, My contribution, From the work of the church?

We need to, Seek to be great encouragers, To people, Because this is a time, For encouragement, There are times, Of course, For critique, There are times, For rebuke, The Bible brings that to us, And God is very good, At doing that himself, But this is a time, Especially for encouragement, And we are here as worshipers of God, To encourage one another today, Under the worship of God, Under what we owe to God, We owe to each other, To encourage us, And we need to go to our neighbors, And to our friends, And to those who are hesitant, And those who are reluctant, And those who have fallen away altogether, And we need to try and encourage them, To be part of the rebuilding, To come back, And to seek the Lord again, In their hearts, To come and join together with us, In the work of the church, In the work of rebuilding, What is it, What is necessary, [57 : 43] For you to be, Involved in the work of rebuilding, What is necessary for you to, Contribute to the work of the church, In building up, The cause of Christ, Under the gospel, Well, Many things you might say, In answer to that question, But one thing especially, That you love the Lord, That's what these people, Were motivated by, They loved God, They were concerned, As servants, Of this God of heaven and earth, To be involved in rebuilding, Because they loved him, They loved his cause, They loved his, His, They loved his people, They loved his covenant, They loved his promises, That's what gave them the motivation, That's why they were involved with it, That's why they were working in rebuilding, And today when you love the Lord, You want to be involved as much as you can, Not at a minimum, Not neglecting other things you have to do in the world,

Family responsibilities, Work responsibilities, But nevertheless not, At a minimum, In your contribution, To building up the cause of Christ, Thomas Watson wrote, A wee book, It's still available, It's a wonderful book, A book that you will, I'm sure, Read many times, It's called, The Godly Man's Picture, And the subtitle of it is, Characteristic Marks, Of a Man Who is Going to Heaven, Of course by that he means women as well, It's just a way of referring to people, And this is what he says, A godly man strives to be an instrument For making others godly, He is not content to go to heaven alone, But wants to take others there also, The glory of Christ is as dear to him As his own salvation, Therefore to promote this, He strives with the greatest effort To bring souls to Christ, It is a glory to Christ,

When multitudes are born to him, Every convert is a jewel Adorning his crown, Though Christ's glory cannot be increased As he is God, Yet as mediator it may be, The more that are saved, The more Christ is exalted, Why else should the angels rejoice Rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, But because Christ's glory now shines, The more.

We are servants, Of the God of heaven and earth, And we are rebuilding, And that means you, And it means me, None of us can say, That's not a task for me, That's not a task for which I am equipped, First of all, Make sure you're born again, Make sure you're a Christian, Make sure you're in Christ, That's the priority, But as a Christian, Once you've seen to that, You are a servant of the most high God, And you are involved in the rebuilding, The constant work of building spiritually, In the church of God, On earth, Let's pray, Almighty God, We give thanks for the privilege, Of involving us in the rebuilding of your church, In the constant ongoing work of the gospel, We thank you Lord, For the provision that you make for us,

In the work of your spirit in our own hearts, And in the promise of your spirit, That your word will not go forth without effect, We ask that you would give us Lord today, To increase our own zeal and commitment, To your cause, And to the work of your church on earth, We ask that, Like Isaiah, We might be able to say, Lord, Here I am, Send me, And may it be true of us, Oh Lord, That we fulfill, That obligation to yourself, And so that we carry forward, The work of the gospel, For generations to come, But to also, In regard to the generations, That have gone before us, Receive our thanks be with us, Throughout this day, And pardon our sin, For Christ's sake, Amen.

[62 : 10] Our final psalm today, This morning is Psalm 48, Psalm 48 from page 273, And verses 10 to 14, O Lord, According to thy name, Through all the earth thy praise, And thy right hand, O Lord, Is full of righteousness, Always.

We'll sing to a tune, Gainsborough, That's Psalm 48, On page 273, The last four verses, O Lord,
According to thy name, O Lord, According to thy name, Through all the earth thy praise, And thy
right hand, O Lord, O Lord, Is full of righteousness, Always.
Because by judgment, Let thy right hand, O Lord, Let thy right hand, Let thy right
hand, Let thy right hand, Rejoice, Of true joy, The daughters all, Send forth a cheerful voice, Walk
up, Walk up, And sigh on, And around, The high terms thereof tell, Considering her fallacies, And
mark,
And mark, Our bold works well, That ye may tell, Most gravity, For this, God a fight, And God
forevermore he will Even unto death the sky 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 now and evermore Amen
Amen