

The Light of God's Glory Changes Things

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[0 : 00] Good evening everybody. It's nice to have you with us and we pray that as we meet together around God's Word and as we hear what he has to say to us that it will be a blessing to our souls and our dependence and our hope is upon him.

We're going to begin first of all with a short reading from God's Word and we're going to read from Matthew's Gospel, Gospel of Matthew chapter 3, reading from the beginning. In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, for this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt round his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptise you with water for repentance. But he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. Amen. May God bless to us that reading of his holy word. We can now engage in prayer. Lord our God, we give thanks for being able to meet this evening. We give thanks, Lord, for your goodness and mercy towards us. We give thanks, Lord, that as we come before you every single day, we come with new worries and new concerns and new needs. Every day our own individual situation changes, even although there might be much that is repetitive in life. And maybe many of the burdens that we have had yesterday, we have today, and as spared, we'll have tomorrow. But we recognise, O Lord, that we come to one who is free from change.

And that is something which is so good to know, because our circumstances change every day. We ourselves change. We change physically and mentally, spiritually, emotionally, socially, in all the different aspects of our lives. We change, but you are free from change.

[3 : 19] And your promises are free from change, because they come from your word, the word of your mouth. And so we pray that we may hold upon all the great truths that your word teaches us.

And that your spirit will apply these truths to our hearts, so that we might hear and our souls believe. And that we'll be strengthened in the faith. And that we will rejoice in the Lord.

Help us, Lord, to rejoice in you, that the joy of the Lord will be your strength. As we journey through life facing all its challenges and opportunities, we pray, O Lord, that you'll grant us your grace. That you'll give us wisdom for every situation that we confront.

And that you'll give us grace for every trial that we face. And that you will give us a sense of hope in our heart. As we live in a world that is often void of hope.

And that we may indeed discover more and more the beauty that is in Jesus Christ. The psalmist said, And that might be part of our own thinking.

[4 : 38] Even although we cannot get to your house just now. Surely some of what the psalmist is saying is echoing within our own heart. Because we long for the day when we'll all be able to get back together.

Not as a limited number. But that we'll all be able to gather in the courts of your house. But this is where we are just now. And you have made provision for us.

And we give thanks, Lord, that this provision is set in your time. And so that the word of God is able to go out to people. And we pray, Lord, that hearts might be open and receptive to the truth.

We live in an uncertain day. And we realize that this little germ in the air. This little germ that can be passed from one person to another. For some people it doesn't do anything.

But for other people it is devastating. It has brought so many deaths globally. And it has brought so much heartache in its wake. We pray, Lord, for a vaccine to be discovered quickly.

[5 : 43] And medication that will take the worst out of this illness. We pray to restore those who are still suffering the effects of the illness. We pray to heal the hearts of those who have been broken through the deaths that have occurred at this time.

And we pray, Lord, for all our NHS staff and carers who have battled in a wonderful way. Coping with what is beyond often coping with.

And we give thanks, Lord, for their courage and for their dignity and for all that they have done and given of themselves. Lord, our God, again we pray for our leaders and those in authority over us at Westminster and in Holyrood and here locally in the council.

We pray, Lord, that you will direct them. That you will give them the wisdom that is from above.

Lord, we pray for justice in our land. And so often there seems to be a sense of injustice.

And there are so many hearts that just feel so let down because of a sense of injustice. And so, Lord, we pray that you will bring peace to our communities and peace to our streets.

[6 : 55] Because there seems to be so much anger and such a lack of peace throughout our land. And, Lord, we recognise that so much of this is because we have turned our back upon the Prince of Peace, the one who does bring peace.

No, Lord of God, open hearts and open minds. And we pray, Lord, that you would give us a heart for yourself. And when we pray for ourselves, we pray for all the nations of this world.

And ask, Lord, particularly for the nations that have closed their doors to you. Where your word is not permitted or given freedom like we have here. Grant, Lord, that it might please you to relax these laws.

So that your people in countries that are persecuted and deprived of the freedom to worship as we are. That they may be able to enjoy the freedoms that we have too.

O Lord, be with us, we pray. Be with those who mourn monsters. Again, even in this last week, we have experienced death in our congregation. And so we pray, Lord, for every broken heart, every pained heart.

[8 : 04] And we ask, Lord, that you will comfort and do good to all who are sorrowing and sad just now. Be with our young people during the holidays. Watch over them. Be with them as they will soon be preparing to go back to school.

Keep them safe. Keep them safe. And teachers and janitors and all school workers, all helpers and canteen staff and all who are involved in the running of the school.

We ask, Lord, that you will watch over each and every one. Grant wisdom to our headteachers and those who have the greatest responsibilities and that you will bless them.

Give thanks, Lord, for all that was done for our young people in our congregation and in many other congregations throughout the time of the COVID when not able to meet as normal.

Give thanks, Lord, for the great commitment that was made. And we so often maybe don't appreciate just all that has been done. But, Lord, we give thanks and we know that you take note of everything.

[9 : 05] So be with us, we pray. Watch over us and take away from us our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Just a wee word to the young people.

Today, the 2nd of August, might not be a very special day for many people. But for me, it is quite a special day because the 2nd of August, which is today, actually is my birthday.

And I don't know if there are any famous people who share my birthday. But I do know, in fact, she is very famous.

One lady in the congregation, Emma MacDonald, who stays not far from where we stay ourselves here. And it's Emma's birthday as well. So I know of one other person whose birthday it is.

So, Emma, a happy birthday to you. When our birthdays come, it reminds us, of course, of the fact of when we were actually born into this world.

[10:13] The day that we were born into the world. And that, of course, is the date. It's written, yet you have your birth certificate. And it tells you there, actually, tell you not just the day you were born, but the very time that you were born.

I can remember when our children were born. My memory is terrible for some things. Marie was born at 13.40. And Norman at 2 minutes to 12.

And Abigail at 20 to 6 in the morning. It's on the birth certificate. And if you don't believe me, go and check it. But it's funny. There's some things that are ingrained, etched into my mind.

So you, as children, you don't remember when you were born. But there are people, especially parents, they really remember because it was such a special event.

Although we know, sadly, that for some people, it can be very sad things where things go wrong. But your birthday is something that you carry with you all throughout your life.

[11:18] Of course, there have been many famous people that have been born into this world. People, and sometimes when you look at a little baby, you wonder, I wonder what he'll become. I wonder what she'll become. I wonder what they'll do in this life.

And I'm sure many parents would never believe just how wonderful the contribution to life that the little children, the little baby that they brought into this world and brought up, that they went on to do and to achieve.

But nobody ever did what the Lord Jesus did. Because Jesus was the greatest, the most miraculous, the most amazing birth ever in this world.

And nobody ever managed to do or ever achieved in their life what the Lord Jesus did. Because Jesus came into this world to die.

Now, unless Jesus comes first, we will all at some point die. And we hope that all of us will live a good long life.

[12:23] But we know that that is what will one day happen. Unless Jesus comes first. But Jesus, when he came into this world the first time, he's coming again.

When Jesus came into this world the first time, he came for one reason. He came to obey the law that we couldn't obey. And he came to die the death that we should die.

But he came so that we don't have to die that death. Because he came to pay for all our sins. For every bad thing that we've ever said or done or thought or that we are.

And that's why he went to the cross. Now, his death was a terrible death. We know that. But he wasn't the only person who was ever crucified. They said of people who were crucified that they died a thousand deaths.

It was such a cruel, horrific way to die. But Jesus wasn't the only person. Many, many people have been crucified in this cruel, horrible world.

[13:32] Where there's so much cruelty. But he did far more than just die. He took upon him all God's punishment. For our sins.

And the wonderful thing is that if we accept Jesus. God will accept us. Because of what Jesus has done. He's paid the price.

He's done it all for us. Supposing for some reason you owed somebody 50 pounds. And this person is quite an angry, a tough person.

And they come to you and say, right, I need that 50 pound a day. And if you don't give me that 50 pound a day, I'm going to beat you up. And you say to Jesus, I don't have 50 pound. What am I going to do? And there's a friend over there.

And you say to the friend, I'm in trouble. Because he's going to beat me up if I don't give him the 50 pound. And the friend says, don't you worry.

[14:29] I've got plenty of money. I'll pay it for you. And he goes and he pays the 50 pound for you. That's you. You're free. You're debt free.

You don't owe that person any money now. Because your friend has paid it for you. And Jesus, who called himself the friend of sinners, he says, I'll pay what you should have to pay.

And when we take Jesus into our heart, then we are right with God because of what Jesus has done for us.

Jesus' coming into this world was the greatest birth that ever took place because of what he did.

And Jesus' death was the most powerful death that ever happened in this world because of what he did.

Will you trust in this Jesus? I'm going to say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

[15 : 36] Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 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 again from God's Word this time from the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 40.

The prophecy of Isaiah chapter 40. And we're going to read the first eight verses. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord some double for all her sins.

A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low.

[16 : 39] The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

A voice said cry, and I said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows on it.

Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Amen.

And may God bless to us this reading of his own holy word. Let's now think on these verses from Isaiah chapter 40, from verse 3.

A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low.

[17 : 41] The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

We like our lives to be lived on a level field. We like everything to go as smoothly as possible.

Now often we know that life doesn't work like that. But in order for us to try and make life work well, it involves planning. And particularly if you've got some big thing on, some project you're going to work on, or something that you're going to do.

Before you start out, it always involves a fair bit of planning. And even although things can go wrong when you do plan, normally, if you plan well, things should turn out reasonably.

Now with all due respect, the greatest planning that ever took place, the greatest project that this world has ever known, is God's project of salvation.

[18 : 54] Now use that word reverently. Because God, we term it God's plan of salvation. And that plan involves a project. And God planned to save us.

His whole working throughout the history of this world has been in order that his kingdom would come. And that his glory would be revealed.

And everything that's happening in this world, at the very heart of it, we often can't see that. We sometimes wonder what is happening to God's word and to God's kingdom.

But God's kingdom is growing throughout this world in ways that we don't realise or understand.

And so that the whole of God's purposes in this world is ultimately the growth of his kingdom.

That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer, Thy kingdom come. And to a certain extent, that is what this passage is about. It is about the coming of God's kingdom into this world.

[20 : 03] Now of course, one of the things that we find when we study the Bible, and even when we study life itself, is that God works slowly. He can work instantly, in a moment, and he has often done that.

But he's never in a hurry, in the sense that we're often in a hurry. In fact, Jesus used to say to the disciples, Your time's always now.

Like they wanted everything now. And Jesus said, That's not the way it works. And if we are following the Lord, it's one of the rules in life that we have to learn.

And it's one of the hardest rules for us to learn. And particularly in the age that we're living in. If it was hard for our forebears, who lived not in a push-button age, then for us who live in the day of the immediate, where there's immediate money and immediate food, there's immediate communication, all these things.

And that's all around the world. It's globally, immediate. God says, My time, I have a timetable. And we're going to remember that God who works surely, is a God for whom one day is a thousand

years.

[21 : 22] He's not in any hurry. And he has seen the whole span of time as one. So we've got to remember that part of our problem in life is that we're, first of all, we're so caught up with ourselves that we don't understand God's big picture.

But also, we are so limited in our understanding that we often don't realize that day by day and week by week and month by month and year by year, God is working towards a particular end. He's never in a hurry. And you can see that over and over and over again. And all the different, you look at Moses. God was preparing Moses to lead his people, Israel, out of Egypt. What did he do? He left him for 40 years in the wilderness as a shepherd. So that he was being molded and prepared by God to spend the next 40 years in the wilderness, leading a huge nation out.

God left Joseph for years in a prison, preparing him, breaking him, reshaping him, remolding him to become his man, to become the second in Egypt, like the second only to Pharaoh, in order to deliver his people and to provide for his people.

[22 : 49] So you see, God is never in a hurry. And he says that he waits in order to be gracious, because he has a time and a purpose for everything.

Now, so here we have, it's telling us about the glory of the Lord being revealed. And so we need patience to learn his way and his time.

Now, we know that before Jesus came, John the Baptist was the one who came to prepare the way for Jesus. And that's what this prophecy is talking about.

Now, when Isaiah was prophesying to the Jews, he was prophesying about captivity. They ended up becoming captive to Babylon.

But he's also talking about the restoration. From exile. And for the rebuilding of the temple and rebuilding of Jerusalem. All these things.

[23 : 45] And one of the great things that Isaiah kept telling the people was, that even although they were going to go through difficult times and hard times, God was never going to abandon them.

Even although it might appear in the exile that God had forgotten all about them, God hadn't. Although they had abandoned God and turned their back upon God, and they'd gone after other gods to serve them.

And God said, If you do that, my judgment will fall upon you, and you'll be taken out of this land into a strange land. And they wouldn't listen. They wouldn't listen. And eventually, what God said, as is always the case, came true.

But even although they had turned their back upon God, and he never turned his back upon them. And so he restored them. So Isaiah is full of all these promises of restoration and recovery.

And so it's wonderful to know that God's presence will always be with us. And maybe today you're going through difficult times, hard times, and you feel that God has left you, or abandoned, and you say, Lord, I don't know where you are in this.

[24 : 53] You know what God says? My presence will go with you, and I'll give you rest. You might not experience rest right now, but I'm going to give it to you. I'll never leave you.

He says, I'll never forsake you. Remember, we were looking a few weeks ago, and you say, the Lord is saying again, and I say, though even a mother of a little baby may forsake, which is probably the hardest thing to imagine happening, yet he says, I'll never forsake you.

My goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. And so we can count upon the promised presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. But here we see a New Testament fulfillment of the prophecy that is given here.

Because John the Baptist, remember we looked at John the Baptist last week, looked at his death. He was the one who prepared the way for Jesus. And remember his ministry, we read about that this morning, we read about that at the beginning, in our first reading, was one of repentance, to repent and to believe, because the kingdom of God had come.

And so we find that John was the one who came to prepare the way for Jesus. You see, God is always making preparation. For Israel, before the gospel came, the law was given.

[26 : 24] The law is the schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. It's the same for ourselves today. And God often does work within us before we come to the place where we receive and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our own personal saviour.

So the Lord, he's always honest with us and he's direct with us. And he wants us to know the truth. So there's a highway to make straight away right into our heart.

And the Lord has set out in his word everything that we need to know in order that we become Christians. Everything that we need in order that we may develop and grow as believers.

And that is why the preaching of the word must always be as straightforward and as uncomplicated as possible. We're not in the business of putting forward our own ideas.

We're not here to try and develop as orators. We're not here in order to project things in as difficult as possible.

[27 : 32] Maybe to try and display a person's learning of the word. No. We're to make it as straightforward and as plain as possible. There was nobody who taught more simply and yet more profoundly than the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

He was so direct and he was so plain. I am the way. I'm the truth. I'm the life. I am the living water. I am the bread of life. He was very direct and very clear.

Now it tells us here that every valley will be lifted up. Now if you're out for a long walk and suppose you're in the hills. Very often when you go down into a valley it's a long way down and you have a long climb back up.

It can be quite disheartening at times. And sometimes even when you come down into the depth of this valley it can be wet and marshy, full of bog and marsh. And sometimes the valleys aren't that great.

Particularly if it's a long way down and a long way back up. We would rather that we could just get straight across. But our hearts are full of valleys. Things that keep us back from God.

[28 : 41] There is a first valley I would call the valley of ignorance. And I'm talking here spiritually. Because that's got nothing to do with a person's academic abilities or their IQ level or the brilliance of their minds.

It's spiritually we're speaking. And by nature that's how we are. We're spiritually ignorant of what God is saying. We're not grasping. We're not understanding. And it's not just our human minds that don't grasp.

The enemy of our souls. The devil doesn't want us to understand or grasp. He's doing everything in his power to keep us from laying hold upon the truth. So that we're left in darkness.

We're left in this ignorance. But the Lord says when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And when the glory of the Lord is revealed it means his light comes in.

And that's one of the wonderful things. Jesus said I'm the light of the world. And into our hearts comes this light. Where we begin to see things.

[29 : 48] And begin to understand things. Maybe very slowly at first. Just maybe like the light of the dawn. Where at the very first flickers of dawn. It's a world of shapes and shadows.

But bit by bit that becomes clearer and clearer. And you begin to see and understand. And you realize. And it's becoming the picture.

It's becoming the world. It's becoming clearer and clearer. And so it is when Jesus deals with our souls. And when the light comes in we also see our need.

We see our need of our saviour. We see that we're unclean. That we're filthy. That we need cleansing. That we need washing. That we need forgiveness. And so.

This is the first big valley. That has to be dealt with. There's another valley. And that's the valley of unbelief. Because again naturally. We just don't believe. We might believe with our minds.

[30 : 44] We might believe the Bible to be true. And say you know I believe that. I believe all the teachings of Jesus. And that's a great thing if you do. But it's one thing to believe in your head.

It's another thing to believe in your heart. Because when you come to believe in your heart. It changes everything. Everything that you believed in your mind. Becomes real into you.

And you lay hold upon this truth. And you say this is mine. And you know one of the wonderful things. That comes the moment that you begin to believe. A hope is born in your heart. You know the expression.

When there's life. There's hope. Well that is true. Even more so spiritually. The moment there is light. There is life. And once there is life.

There is hope. And that's one of the wonderful things that the Christian has. Is hope. Because there's so many people in this world today. Have no hope. And they're saying what's it all about?

[31 : 41] Why am I here? There's so much despair. And emptiness. And void. In so many people's lives. And Jesus is saying. It need not be like that. I'll give you life.

And when I give you life. I give you hope. Hope in himself. Hope in the future. Because Jesus alone is the future. And then it says every mountain will be made low.

Now we face many mountains and obstacles in our life. But spiritually speaking. You know one of the greatest mountains that we have to face. Is the mountain of self-righteousness.

It's probably the great hindrance to our salvation. It's what blocks us from coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And self-righteousness is very simply saying.

I'm good enough in myself. God will have to accept me. I know I'm not perfect. I know I've made many mistakes. I've done many things that are wrong.

[32 : 38] And I've said things. You know my life. When I view it. It's not good. But I'm not a bad chap. I'm not a bad lady. I'm not a bad man. I'm not bad. I'm okay.

And you know the phrase. It'll be alright in the night. We have this idea that somehow. God will say it's alright. You're a decent enough person. That's not what the Bible says to us.

If we were decent enough in ourselves that God could accept us. He would never have sent a son into this world to die for us.

It's because we can't save ourselves. Because we can't make ourselves right with God. Because we can't deal with the sin of our heart which is an offence before God.

Our God is so clear, clean and pure and holy that he cannot meet with us until our sin is dealt with through his son, the God man.

[33 : 40] And that is something that is so hard for us to lay hold of. But when the glory of the Lord is revealed, when the light comes, we begin to see, I am unclean.

I am a man of unclean lips, as Isaiah said. Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner. That's what happens when the light comes in. When the glory is revealed, our self-righteousness crumbles. And we say, no righteousness will do me any good apart from the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And so we see that everything is made level and straight.

And that's what the Lord is going to do, make it level for us. Now, while that is true spiritually, we also know that God is in the way of trying to, not trying to, of working things out for us.

And you might find that hard to understand today because your life might be very painful and sad. And you've often asked yourself, Lord, asked yourself, I wonder what on earth God is doing in my life.

[34 : 52] Because it seems so difficult and so complicated. But we go back to the big picture. Because one day you will see that God had a plan for your life.

It wasn't your plan. It's like he was talking about that on Wednesday night at the prayer meeting. About how our plans, how David had his plan to build a temple for the Lord.

And the Lord says, good idea, but it's not you. Your son's going to do it. How do we react to how God changes our plans? Because he often does it.

Because he already has a plan for our life. And this is where submitting to God is so difficult.

Because we're having to submit to his greater plan, which sometimes we don't think is a greater plan.

It's only faith that can lay hold upon it and say, Lord, I don't understand just now. But I know you have a plan for my life. And one day we will see it.

[35 : 54] And we'll see it when it's revealed. You know, when you in Jesus come to sleep in Jesus and leave this world. And for you the glory of the Lord is revealed in a way you've never seen in this world.

You will begin, you will then see the wonder of all that the Lord has done for you. And you'll say, Lord, I can't hardly believe how wonderful your plan and your purpose is worth for me in this world. So this is where we have to go. And to leave ourselves in the care of the God who has come for us and has made straight this way of salvation.

And he says, please, for your own good, turn from your own way. Follow me. Follow my way. And accept my plans for your life.

Let us pray. Lord, we pray to bless this word to our hearts. We pray that you will do us good. And that you will watch over us and cleanse us from our sin.

[37 : 02] In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. We're going to conclude singing from Psalm 111. Psalm 111 in the Scottish Psalter. And we're going to sing from verse 6 to the end.

He did the power of his works unto his people show, when he the heathen's heritage upon them did bestow. His handiworks are truth and right. All his commands are sure.

And done in truth and uprightness, they evermore endure. Psalm 111, verses 6 to the end. He did the power of his works. He did the power of his works unto his people show, When he the heathen's heritage upon them did bestow.

His handiworks are truth and right.

All his commands are sure. All his commands are sure. And done in truth and uprightness, He'll soon your move to his people and Venice.

[38 : 48] He sent redemption to his folk, His covenant forever, he did command only his name.

Unreverend is always wisdom's beginning is God's fear.

Good understanding there of all that is, all man's fulfill his praise and use glory.

Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore.

Amen.