

The Way of Holiness

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Date: 06 September 2015

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[0 : 00] The land allotted me is in a place inside, and surely my inheritance to me is a delight.

I'll praise the Lord my God, whose counsel guides my choice, and even in the night my heart recalls his version's voice.

Before me constantly, I set the Lord alone.

My body too will rest, securing hope and wavering.

For you will not allow my soul in death to stay.

[2 : 05] Nor will you leave your Holy One to see that turns decay.

You have made known to me the path of life divine.

This shall I know at your right hand. Joy from your face will shine.

Amen. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it.

They shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

[3 : 34] They shall obtain gladness and joy. Sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Sorrow and sighing shall be upon their heads.

Testament times when the Lord Jesus has come into this world and ushered in, as it were, a new dispensation. Others see it as Christian experience.

A very individual, very personal. While all of these things can be true, It's very clear that when you come to the end of it, Here is a very clear picture of the believer arriving in heaven.

And it's one of these portions of God's word that we go back to again and again and again, Because it's just so full of where we are and our journey homewards.

It's a chapter that the Lord Jesus Christ himself used when he was here in this world. You remember how John the Baptist sent to Jesus at one time asking, He sent messengers from prison when John was in prison asking if Jesus really was the Messiah.

[5 : 11] Do you remember what Jesus did? He could have taken people who were blind and healed them, But he didn't. He quoted from this.

And he told the messengers that he was fulfilling exactly all that was written here. So Jesus was doing something really wonderful, Something that we always have to do.

That he's actually saying to John, Even greater than experience is the scripture, The fulfillment, the truth of the word. And so that this is a message that Jesus is saying, Look, the word of God is being fulfilled.

The word of God, which is the only rule to direct us, That word is being fulfilled in your presence. Go and tell that to John. Now, as we read this chapter, and particularly these verses, It becomes very clear that it's talking of a journey.

It's talking of a way. And that is something that the Bible is always highlighting about the Christian faith. The Christian faith is movement. That's one of the pictures you will always find right throughout the Bible.

[6 : 24] There's always movement. It's never static, never kind of just standing still. It's always moving. A lot of the Psalms have movement. There's always a kind of, there's a progression. Even if it's from the depths rising out of it.

If it's the movement of a desire to get to God's house. Desire to get to heaven. There's always this sense of moving on. Jesus himself said, he said, I am the way.

So often we find it written in the word. As for God, perfect is his way. The good and perfect way.

The good and right way. So we often have this idea of a way.

And here we see very simply that there is a particular way. And it's termed here a highway. And we see that there are certain people who are on that highway.

We'll see that in a moment. And very simply, everybody, everybody is either traveling on this highway or they're not. This highway is what is described elsewhere as a narrow way.
[7 : 31] There's a broad road. Jesus said that leads to destruction. The narrow way, which is this highway, leads to eternal life. And everybody is either on that road or it's not.

We gave some quotes from Martin Luther on Wednesday. And one of his quotes was that everybody, what he was saying very simply, that all people, everywhere, do two things. There are two things that nobody else can do for you. One of these things is believing. Nobody else can believe for you. It is so personal. It is individual.

You either believe or you don't. And the other thing he said nobody else can do for you is die. All believing is individual. It's personal.

And dying is individual, personal. No matter how close you are to friends and families, they can't die for you. You have to die yourself.

[8 : 41] So that's what he was simply saying. And that's where we find here that that's a great appeal of the gospel is that you believe. Nobody else can believe for you.

You yourself have to believe. And so we see here that there is this highway. Now, a thing about, I remember looking at this particular verse, at verse 8, but I want to just look at the whole section just now some time back.

And one of the things about a highway is that you cannot just go and build a road. Supposing you had all the means in the world. You can't just go and build a road.

I can't just decide one day. Supposing I was able to gather all the money that was just a vast amount of money and say, right, I'm going to build a new road to loss. Because there's far too many twists and turns.

In fact, I'm going to build a road direct to the church, to the cemetery, to where it is in CrossFit. I'm going to build a new road. I'm going to build a new road. Because I don't want to be going around all these twists and turns.

[9 : 46] And if I have to put a bridge over the loch, so be it. But I'm going to build a straight road. Supposing I was a multi-billionaire. I couldn't do that. Because you'd have to get, without the building, I suppose you can build a wee path within your own, I don't know what planning it, I have no idea.

But I'm sure within your own grounds you could put a wee path if you wished. But you cannot go and build a road. You have to have authority to do so. And that's what was true of this particular highway.

It has been built with all the authority of the Godhead. That's where the planning took place. This road was built, this highway was built with planning.

And it was commissioned with all the authority of the Godhead. Another thing about a highway is it costs a fortune. I suppose that's one of the arguments that has been given for so long about the upgrading to the A9 of making the whole road, which it should be dual carriageway.

But it's going to cost an absolute fortune. It has been promised that it will take place, but that's over many years. Because of the astronomical costs. But you know, the cost of this highway is so great.

[11 : 04] It's not a great thing that supposing all the people in this world clubbed together and tried to pay for it. They couldn't. It is priceless. There was only one who could pay for it.

And that was Jesus. And that's why the offer of the gospel is without money and without price. Because we do not have the wherewithal.

We do not have the resources to pay for it. All the paying has already been done. Another thing we would say about a highway is it's very clearly marked.

There might be wee roads here and there. There are little track roads. But everything is marked nowadays. But a highway is clearly marked. And so it is of this highway.

People can't turn around and say, oh, I didn't know. The Bible makes it abundantly clear. Week in, week out, not just in this pulpit, but pulpits up and down our land.

[12 : 02] This way is proclaimed. The invitation to walk this way is given. Every week from this pulpit, the invitation to walk on this way is given.

It's signposted. People, our main job above anything else is to point people to Jesus Christ. That is the main work above everything else.

When Paul went to Corinth, that's what he said. I was determined, he said, when I was among you not to know anything, to be involved in anything except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

I wasn't concerned about other things. It is just to know Jesus, to proclaim Jesus so that you will come to know him. And so that's the signposting of this way. But yet many people choose not to. It comes down to this choice and they're saying, well, no, I don't want to walk on this particular route.

[13:05] But God says to us, this is a way. Walk you on it. So this highway, as we say, has been given a particular name. And it's called the way of holiness.

And of course, this is a name which describes God himself. It's his way. God could have given many descriptions about himself. But one of the descriptions he often gives in scripture is that he is holy.

I am holy. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. In fact, the Lord says to us, you be holy, for I am holy.

Now, a lot of people don't like the idea particularly of holiness. But you know something, do you know what it actually says in the Bible? Without holiness, no one shall see the Lord.

That's a challenging statement. That's what it says. Now, this holiness talks of the otherness, the separateness of God. So this is what this road is called.

[14:12] It's called the way of holiness. And when the Lord says that without holiness, no one shall see the Lord, I think it's very clear to say that the holier a person becomes, the more that they're able to see of the Lord.

And so it tells us here, the unclean shall not pass over it. It's a holy way, the unclean. So straight away, that might cause a kind of confusion within us.

Because if you're like me here today, you might be saying to yourself, well, I don't feel very holy. In fact, I feel unclean. Does that mean I can't walk on that way?

Well, I think very simply what it means. There's two things that we see here. Holiness, the holiness of God is untouchable holiness. That marks him out as separate another from everyone else.

But the fact is that when a person becomes a Christian, they immediately become holy in the sense that they've been separated to God.

[15:22] Separated by God and separated to God. That happens right away. We might not analyze it. We might not even be aware that that has actually happened.

But it has. So straight away, the moment we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are holy. And again, with regard to the uncleanness, what we've got to remember here is, yes, we're going to remain unclean.

There's nobody in here who's perfectly clean. There's nobody here without blemish. But the fact is that we have been cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

This uncleanness is talking about people who have not had this cleansing. People who have not been set apart through being born again.

People who have not had their sins washed and forgiven. That's who it's speaking about. Those who are not holy and those who are unclean.

[16:25] You know, when you go to Galatians, it talks about the fruit of the Spirit. It talks about the works of the flesh. And you say to yourself, well, those who walk in this, it must be by evidencing the fruit of the Spirit, guided by the Spirit.

But you know, when you read through Galatians, the works of the flesh are going on within each one of us. We read that section very often before the people come to the Lord's table.

Because it's talking about two different operations that go on. And yet both these operations go on in the heart of the believer.

In fact, I would go as far as to say, if somebody says, oh, I'm a Christian, but I don't know anything of the works of the flesh. I would say to myself, you're a strange Christian.

Because the works of the flesh cause that struggle. That's when all of a, once a person becomes a Christian, it's then that that real conflict takes place.

[17:32] Between the flesh and grace. Between God's work of God's Spirit and our own base nature. They're into conflict. There's a civil war going on within our heart.

So if somebody says, oh, I'm a Christian, but I don't know anything of that. You'd have to say to yourself, well, that's a kind of a strange Christian. And if you're here today and you're having a growing awareness of this.

You might not think you're a Christian, but if you've got a growing awareness. Of God's Spirit, of being drawn in one way and this conflict going on.

Then I would say that's a very, very encouraging thing. And we see here that the unclean shall not pass over. It shall belong to those who walk in the way. Even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

I love that. Even if we're weak and stumble. Even if we're slow of learning. Even if we keep making mistakes. If we're slow to get things on board.

[18 : 34] You know, the Lord's going to keep us. That's one of the beautiful things about this road. You know, once you're on it. You might stumble. You might wander a wee bit. You might slow down.

But you'll never actually fall off it. Because the Lord is a hold of you with his hand. You won't ultimately go astray. The Lord will not lose one. Not even one of his people.

And so this is incredibly encouraging. Then it says that no lion shall be there. Nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it. They shall not be found there. But the redeemed of the Lord shall walk there.

Any of these ravenous beasts. I think here it is talking about all the evils. And particularly the likes of the devil. As a roaring lion going about. Whom he may devour.

Yes, they will growl. And they will roar and threaten. And there's been many a time where we feared along that. But you know, at the end of the day.

[19 : 36] The furious lion that is there is toothless. It cannot devour you. It may roar at you. And threaten you.

And cause you fear and distress. But it cannot devour you. Because you're safe in the Lord Jesus. And then as it says, we see that.

It says there. But the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return. And these two words, the redeemed and the ransomed. Are two words that are almost inseparable. And they speak so much of God's initiative with regard to salvation.

And very simply, it says the redeemed. To redeem is simply to buy back what once was yours. And ransomed is to pay, as it were.

You know how you get paid. Sometimes you hear of kidnappings. Or people demanding a ransom. They're demanding payment. Whether it's in people or in money or whatever. They're demanding a ransom.

[20 : 40] Well, God has paid this ransom. So, we are both redeemed. And we are ransomed. And that's what happened.

You see, when God made us originally. When we were originally made, everything was beautiful. Everything reflected the magnificent beauty and purity and holiness and the knowledge and the righteousness of God.

Then everything went in Eden. There was a total collapse. And so, we were lost. And that's where God took the initiative.

God had purpose. God had plan. And God, by his power, what does he do? Do you see the word? And the ransomed of the Lord shall return. That word, return, is beautiful.

What did Adam and Eve do in the Garden of Eden? They ran away from God. And that's what everybody is doing until the Lord redeems.

[21 : 45] That's why Jesus is termed the Redeemer. Because he pays the ransom. And he brings us back. A homing instinct is born instantly.

In the heart of every person the Lord works in. You're going one direction. The Lord works in your heart. And he turns you around. I'm going home.

That's what salvation does. Turns us back to God. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return. It's beautiful what we have here.

And it tells us that we will come to Zion with singing. And that's, again, a great picture of the Christian. We're going to finish singing Psalm 40.

And it tells us there that he put a new song. Remember after taking from the fearful pit and mighty clay. And then it tells us he put a new song in my mouth. Our God to magnify.

[22 : 49] So that those that God works in, as they turn some round and they head for home, they head home with a song in their heart.

And that's one of the things that you come to realize when you come to faith. There's just this sense of, a sense of belonging. I remember I've said it so often when I became a Christian, there was an awful lot of things I couldn't understand.

And I felt so many things I would hear people talk and I said, oh, I can't enter into your experiences. But there was a couple of things I knew. I had a sense of belonging that I hadn't had before. It's, the Lord just gives you that. Because I used to be always afraid of God. Fear went. So two things, a sense of belonging and a sense of peace.

And that's, we have this song. But although we begin to sing this song in this world, we don't sing it all the time. It'll never go away.

[23 : 51] The song never goes away. But there are times, difficult times, various times in Christian experience when we find it hard to sing. We sang about that in Psalm 137.

The exile found it hard. And they were saying, how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? That's what they're saying. They had actually hung their hearts on the willow trees.

They had lost the ability to sing in captivity. And you know, when we become Christians, that's one of the things that happens.

This land becomes a strange land. What do we mean by that? Well, beforehand, before you're a Christian, you just go along with the ways, the philosophies, the aims, the goals of this world. But when you become a Christian, things change. You begin to see things a little different. That doesn't mean, don't get me wrong, of course you're involved in the world. Of course you're involved, this is where you live.

[24 : 56] You're involved in your work. You're involved in lots of things. And you catch into a lot of things. But deep down, ultimately, you have different objectives.

Different philosophies. There's a kind of a different pulse within you. Because you're going home. This world is no longer your home.

You're not just bogged down and rooted into it anymore. You're moving on. And so, there are times, through various experiences, dark experiences, not just through dark providences, but maybe sometimes through sin, when we lose our way a bit, or through the fierceness of temptation, or when God tests us and hides his presence from us for a while, so we're not conscious of it.

We maybe lose the ability to sing. But we will continue to sing. We will sing it. But then it tells us here, And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and they come to Zion with singing.

And then we see this amazing transformation. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. Perpetual, continual, spontaneous joy, forever and ever.

[26 : 17] And then two things happen at exactly the same time. And I believe this, at a lesser extent, happens when we come to faith.

It's just the beginning of it. But as long as we're in this world, as long as we're in this world, there'll be sorrow and sighing. But see what happens. They shall obtain gladness and joy.

And sorrow and sighing shall flee away. It's not fade away. You know how often things fade away. Feelings can fade.

We look at the dawn. The dawn, the night fades. It's so gradual. The day fades away into the night. It's a slow kind of move.

That's not what we have here. It tells us they shall obtain. Just they'll obtain it right away. Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

[27 : 21] Not fade away, but flee away. It's like it's cast away just instantly. Gone. Forever. Never, ever, ever, ever again. Never feel flat. Or bogged down.

Or weary. Or tired. Or sad. Or depressed. No dark thoughts. You can't even begin to imagine what this world is going to be like.

That's what the Bible tells us. In Jesus. And they shall obtain gladness and joy. Isn't that extraordinary? Forever.

Gladness and joy. I remember when I was a boy. I used to love music. I was always listening to the music. I remember a song by a band, the Dave Clark Five, when I was a young boy.

And it was called Glad All Over. I used to love it. But you know something? In this world, we can never be glad all over for any length of time.

[28 : 17] In heaven we will. Our whole being will be glad all over. We will obtain joy and gladness, which will remain within us forever and ever and ever and ever.

That's the gospel. And if you're walking along this highway, that's what you're going to get. You will obtain it. If you're not, well, I would suggest today, get onto that highway as soon as possible.

And Jesus is inviting you, right here, right now, to come and to walk with him. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we give thanks for your word and for teaching us this great truth.

We pray, O Lord, that we will hear and that we will understand these truths. O Lord, we give thanks for the great, the great future that you have lined up for your people.

If only we could, if only we could see. Mind you, if we could see, we wouldn't want to stay here much longer. But we pray, O Lord, that the eye of faith will see you and cling to you and that we will follow you.

[29 : 33] Forgive us, Lord, all our sin. We pray to be with each and every one of us. We pray, Lord, to take us to our home safely. Pray for the cup of tea, coffee in the hall after. Pray for students who are going away back to colleges and universities and particularly for those who are going away for the first time.

We commit them to your care. Watch over us all, we pray. Do us good. Keep us safe and forgive us our sin. In Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing in the 40th Psalm from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm number 40.

And we're going to sing verses 1 to 4. Psalm 40, verses 1 to 4. The tune is Balerma. I waited for the Lord my God and patiently did bear.

At length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear. He took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay. And on a rock he set my feet, establishing my way.

He put a new song in my mouth, O God, to magnify. Many shall see it and shall fear and on the Lord rely. O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies, respecting not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lie.

[30 : 54] Psalm 41 to 4. I waited for the Lord my God. Amen. I waited for the Lord my God ambition to bear.

And left to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear.

He took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay.

And on a rock he set my feet, He put a new song in my mouth, Our God, to magnify.

many shall see it and shall fear.

[32 : 34] And on the Lord rely. O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies, respecting not the proud, or such, as turn aside to life.

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