

Thanksgiving Service - Happy Are You, O Israel!

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in Deuteronomy chapter 33 and the last verse, verse 29.

Deuteronomy 33 verse 29. Happy are you, O Israel, who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph.

Your enemies shall come falling to you, and you shall tread upon their backs. A lot of people think that Christians are miserable.

People, they genuinely think that when a person starts to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, when a person becomes a Christian, that they've kind of waved bye-bye to a life of excitement, a life of fun, a life of happiness.

A lot of people tonight, if you were to go around Stornoway and to ask people, what do you think it is, what do you think it's like to be a Christian? A lot of people would say, poor, you'd be miserable.

[1 : 14] Because they look on the Christian life as a life of do's and don'ts, of regulations and rules. And there is a complete failure to understand of what it is that the Lord Jesus Christ has done within our lives.

There is a failure to grasp the radical change that has taken place, so that old things have passed away, and old things have become new.

And that's what this verse, to a certain extent, is telling us. This verse really is almost summing up all that has gone before. Here is Moses, and he is just about to leave the people.

He has been their commander, their leader. He's taken them out of Egypt. He's taken them through the wilderness. They're now on the borders of the Promised Land. And what I love about Moses, we're not looking at Moses tonight, but here he is.

He's 120 years of age. It tells us in the next chapter that, verse 7, Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated.

[2 : 28] It's quite amazing, 120. He didn't need glasses. His eyes were as sharp and focused at 120 as ever, and his strength was unabated.

He was as strong in his mind and in his body as he had ever been. It's quite remarkable when you think of the service that he had given. But he is giving his farewell speech to Israel.

He's been with them all through this long journey. And he's telling them, he's kind of summing up in this last verse, all that he said before. And he says to them, Happy are you, O Israel.

Now, tonight, as we know, is a Thanksgiving night. It's a very special night where there is more of a focus upon our thanking God.

God. That is a vital part of our Christian faith. It's something that we should always be doing, and I believe it's something we always are doing. We're thanking God. There's so much to thank God for.

[3 : 29] And often, particularly maybe at a night like this, we say to ourselves, You know, I don't thank the Lord nearly enough. And we don't just thank the Lord when everything is going well in Providence.

We thank the Lord for his grace, for all that he is doing for us. Even when things seem to be going against us, we've always got to remember that as a people of God, he's actually working for us. Everything is actually being worked for our good and for God's glory. Even the difficult things, even the things that don't make sense, even the things tonight that hurt you, God is still your God, and he's working for you.

And it's important for us to stop and to reflect upon the good things and the many things that God is giving to us and be thankful for them.

And the old wee chorus is so true. Count your blessings. Name them one by one. And it will, I can't remember, amaze you or surprise you the things that God has done.

[4 : 41] And you know, when we stop and actually think about it and reflect, there is so much to give God thanks for. Sometimes it's difficult when everything is going against you or there's problems in your life.

But sometimes we have to stop and say, Lord, help me. Help me to focus upon you. Help me to see what you've been doing, what you are doing, what you're giving to me. Help me to see your grace. Help me to understand something of who you are and the blessings that you have actually brought into my life. And once we do that, we'll become amazed at just what it is that God is doing within our lives.

And so that's what we're looking at here. And maybe that'll help us a wee bit to reflect upon what God is doing and why we ought to be giving him thanks. And so we see here, this verse gives us lots of reasons why we should thank the Lord.

And the first thing we notice here is that the name given to God's people, happy are you, O Israel. Now, this, we must remember, was a new name.

[5 : 48] It was a new name that was given to Jacob. Jacob was a supplanter. Jacob was the crafty, cunning twin brother who managed to get both the birthright and the special blessing from his brother.

And you remember how, because of particularly his deception in getting the special blessing, he had to run from home because Esau had murder in his heart towards his brother.

And so Jacob had to run away from home. And you remember how, in Genesis 28, where the Lord met with him and he saw the ladder going from the earth up to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending.

And God gave him great promises. But Jacob was away for many, many years. And in the end, the Lord told him to go back home. And on the way back home, you remember the experience that he had at that brook where he wrestled with the angel all night.

And he would not let, we believe the angel of the covenant, he would not let the angel go until he blessed him. And remember how the Lord did bless Jacob.

[7 : 08] And he also told him that he was giving him a new name. He said, you're not going to be Jacob anymore. You're now going to be Israel. And Israel, a prince with God, a prince who has power with God and prevailed.

And you know, that is true of all Christians. Every Christian tonight is an Israelite spiritually. We are of the seed of Israel by faith.

And we have been made new. Everything about us as Christians has been made new. We too have been given a new name. We have new opportunities, new privileges.

We have new aims, new hopes. We have a new destiny in view. Everything is different. And that's what makes the non-Christian unable to understand tonight why the Christian is a happy person. because tonight you know where you're going. You know, it's one of the great things. We've said it so often. People in this world, they often ask the question deep down, you know, what's it all about?

[8 : 17] What's it really all about? You'll often find people saying that even although they're involved in this and that and their lives are busy. But there are moments when they stop and they think, what's it all about?

Why am I running here, there and everywhere? Why am I doing this? Is this all that there is that I just live and then die? Is that it? What's it all about?

Well, the Christian isn't asking that question. Because we know. We know why we're here. Our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

We know where we're going. We know that our life is actually mapped out for us. And that is the most extraordinary comfort for you and me tonight to know that God has a purpose and a plan for your life.

He's leading you. He has a race. You're running a race. And we're told it is a race that is set before us. There it is. It's mapped out. It's marked out. You and I don't know it until we run it.

[9 : 20] We go step by step by step. God doesn't set it all out before you by way of telling you how it's going to be. The way He tells you to go is by His Word.

He says, I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you will go and I will guide you with mine eye. He will guide us through His Word and He will lead us day by day as we walk by faith.

But it's mapped out for us. And that's a great comfort for us. And so tonight, as we say, the old things have passed away, all things have become new.

We tonight are heirs and joint heirs with Christ. We are now royalty. Isn't that extraordinary? The palace on earth might not know anything about us.

Palace on earth doesn't know the first thing about me. Buckingham Palace doesn't know I exist. But the palace in heaven knows we exist because we are precious to the King of Glory.

[10:24] And He's preparing a place. He has prepared a place for us. The Father in heaven, the King of Glory, has prepared a place in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus said to the disciples.

I go to prepare a place for you. And He did that by going to the cross and by dying and rising again and ascending into heaven. And He's coming again for us.

So tonight, we are surely praising God for what He has done. He's done it. And that is a reason for us tonight.

By faith, of course it's by faith we do it. We praise Him for what He has done. And so the throne room of heaven is open tonight to us. And we can go to the Lord with every cry, with every burden, with everything that we have and bring our prayers and petitions before the Lord.

But then we see the description that is given of Israel, God's people, that they're a happy people. Happy are you, O Israel, a people saved by the Lord.

[11:32] Now that's not the definition that the world would give tonight of the Christian. They wouldn't be saying, Oh, a Christian, you know, this are the happiest people in the world. You ask the world tonight, what's your definition of a Christian?

A lot of them would say, Oh, they're miserable. They would, we wouldn't want to hear maybe some of the things that they would say. But happy wouldn't be one of the things that they would describe a Christian as, someone who is happy.

But yet that's what the Word of God says. Now that doesn't mean that the Christian is somebody who's always going about laughing and joyous and giving this expression of being, I'm really up, I'm in cloud nine, I'm full of joy today.

You might be, but the thing is that the Christian, although we are a happy people, that doesn't mean that this sense of what the world may term of laughter and sort of that joyous way that you might be. We often have our struggles. And every Christian has his and his struggles. Maybe tonight you've come and you're saying, I'm hearing you talking about happiness. You know, right now, that is about the last thing I feel.

[12:48] If you could see my home, if you could see my life, if you could see inside me and what I'm going through, happiness, I don't have a t-shirt with happiness on it. In fact, tonight I have a t-shirt with sorrow.

That's where I am. I'm in a bed of sorrow tonight. But sometimes, that's where the Christian is. Sometimes, we're sad, we're broken, we're hurt.

All these things. But that doesn't change the fact that we are still, that the definition that the Bible gives is that we're a happy people.

Jesus himself was a man of sorrows and he was acquainted with grief. And yet, Jesus was full of joy. And the Christian is also full of joy.

We're full of joy because of what lies ahead. As we were just saying there, we are going to the celestial city. You cannot have but joy when you think of what's ahead, of what lies ahead of you.

[13:51] And the Christian joy is not bound by our circumstances. You remember the apostles after the, at the very, in the early church, they would be taken, they would be preaching in the synagogue, they'd be taken and imprisoned, they would be beaten and warned not to preach again.

And did they go home miserable, saying, oh that was terrible, there I was, there's time to preach Jesus Christ and all that happened was I got beaten up, I'm giving up. No. They went home rejoicing.

They were praising God because they were counted worthy to suffer for him. The joy of the Lord was their strength and they were full of joy.

Same as the apostle Paul. Paul and Silas in the prison in Philippi. Having been beaten up and in the inner prison, how do you find them at midnight?

Praising God. And that's of course when the prison doors were thrown open. And so the Christian is somebody who is full of joy.

[14:57] We're full of joy because our sins have been forgiven. Now that is a huge thing. Our guilt has been taken, Christ has taken, you think about it, all our guilt upon himself.

Guilt is an awful thing. You know when you're guilty, when you feel guilty, and you've done something wrong, and you feel guilty. If we could see all our sin and the offence of it, and that all of a sudden we were overwhelmed with the guilt of that sin, do you know it would crush us? It would be too much for us. But Jesus took it on the cross. He took all the guilt that is ours. He took all our sin. He took its punishment.

And he took its corruption. He took every aspect of it. And he bore it away. And tonight, we're delivered.

We're free. And there's many people in town tonight who aren't Christians and although they don't know it, they're riddled with guilt.

[16:11] And guilt is causing them to do all sorts of things. Because they're trying to rid themselves of it. They don't recognize it. They don't realize it. They're not aware that this is what's absolutely putting them, that's screwing them up inside.

And they're trying this and that to get rid of how they feel. And so often it is guilt. And the only way that we can really be delivered from guilt is by the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that produces joy. No wonder we're happy people. And again, there's a sense of belonging. It's one of the great complaints in this world is loneliness. So many people feel lonely.

They feel isolated. Well, you know, the Christian isn't somebody who is lonely. Because we belong. We are a saved people.

That's what the Lord has done. He has saved us. He has saved us from death and destruction and despair and everything like that. And he has saved us to light and to hope and to joy and to peace.

[17:19] And he has brought us into fellowship with himself and with one another. We belong to one another. You know, so often we take it for granted that those praying tonight were just talking about the familiness, the togetherness of us.

and, you know, sometimes we take one another in our natural families we take one another for granted far too often.

And it's often sometimes you go away or something happens and you stop and you think, boy, I've been taking him and her and I've been taking everybody for granted. And sometimes we need to stop and think and realize who we have and what we have.

and it's the same within the fellowship, within the church of Jesus Christ. Sometimes we have to stop and we realize, you know, we belong to one another. And we've got to be aware of this and pray for one another and love one another.

And this is part of the great duty, the great blessing. It's a privilege. And that is why Christian fellowship is so, so important. And so there's this, the Lord is reminding us and he makes us aware that we belong to him.

[18:38] This is part of the Holy Spirit's work where the Spirit convinces our spirit that we are now sons and daughters, that we belong to him.

You know, when you are converted, it's one of the things that happened where you got this sense of belonging. You know, there was a day when, as you thought of God, but it was, you had a kind of a fear of him.

You were afraid of him. You know, that fear went, that fear of where you were afraid. What if he smites me? What if he casts me?

And that goes where there's, in its place now comes a desire to meet with him. And you realize, you know, I belong.

I can go to the Lord anytime. I'm not afraid anymore. Yes, there's a fear, there's a reverent fear. But there's not that scared fear.

[19:36] You say, you know, he's my father, my father in heaven. And that's, that's an incredible privilege. And again, these are reasons why tonight we should go and we should thank him and praise him.

where our thanksgiving is by faith and it's a thanksgiving that's full of hope and it's a thanksgiving that's full of love. And so the Lord, the Lord has blessed us.

Happy are you, O Israel, who is like you, a people saved by the Lord. And you know, the amazing thing, you sometimes say to yourself, why did the Lord save us?

Well, for the same reason as he saved Israel. And why did he save Israel? Well, the Bible tells us for his own good pleasure. And sometimes we can't go beyond that.

It was for his own good pleasure. And you and I can't go in there and into the mind of God. But the mind of God has revealed that to us.

[20 : 42] That is of his own good pleasure. This is why he has set his love upon you. Because he wants to make you part of his family.

And he has prepared this great glory. And this was part of the high priestly prayer when Jesus was going to the cross. And he's saying, Father, I would that those that you have given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory.

Jesus was longing for the day when every single believer would be with him in heaven forever. We mourn and lament when our loved ones go.

But there's no mourning in heaven. There's no mourning in the heart of the one who has departed to be with the Lord. Into the land of eternal joy, eternal celebration, eternal happiness.

And this is the day that Jesus is looking forward to when the last blood-bought one is taken home. And everybody is together forever with him in glory.

[21 : 52] And so this is all for his good pleasure. He is making you and changing you, conforming you to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was a joy that was before Jesus. Jesus, as we said, was a man of sorrows and he was acquainted with grief. But there was a joy set before him.

That's why he endured the cross. We're told that in Hebrews. And so there is this joy also within our own heart. Happy are you, O Israel, who is like you, a people saved by the Lord.

And we see now that there are protected people, a shielded people, the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph. There are many enemies about.

We read that at the end of the verse. You're enemies. We read about them. You're enemies. And let's not kid ourselves. Every believer, if you're a Christian tonight here, you have enemies.

[22 : 53] You have the greatest enemy that could exist in this world, Satan. You're marked out by him. And he will do as much damage to you as he possibly can in whatever way he can.

And if it were possible, he would rip your limb from limb tonight and he would cause other havoc as he did to the family of Job if he could. But you're protected. The Lord is your shield.

He is your protector. In 1 Peter, we're told we are kept by the power of God. The word is like garrisoned.

It's like a there you are, you're so vulnerable but the Lord is putting a garrison around you. He's protecting you. As he did to Job before he gave Satan permission, he put a hedge around him and all that he has.

That's what the Lord has done for you. He is your shield. The shield of your help. And you can go to him any day and any night and you can say to him, Lord, I feel vulnerable.

[24 : 02] I feel scared. Lord, I'm anxious. I feel, Lord, in my workplace. I feel in the home. I feel circumstances. I feel things are out of my control.

You know these times where you think, I can't cope. This is beyond me. Lord, Lord, help. The Lord says, I am. I'm your shield.

I'll protect you. And it's there that we need to trust in him. And we need to trust him every day. And he says, not only is he your shield, he is the sword of your triumph.

A sword doesn't just defend. A sword is used to attack. And you'll notice that it's the sword of your triumph which is talking about victory. Tonight, as we look out on the cause of Christ, we may feel that, as we even look at Great Britain, and we say to ourselves, or even just look in Scotland, and you say, you know, the cause is dying.

Well, it might be just now, and you know how there's ebbing and flowing. Well, just now, the cause of Christ might be at a low ebb in our land tonight.

[25 : 17] But it's not the end of the story. Because the end of the story is going to be victory. For every one of the Lord, the Lord's cause will triumph.

And just as we have here, your enemies shall come falling to you, and you shall tread upon their backs. That's going to be the end. That's the end of the story. Right now, I don't know how it is for you tonight, but it's not the end of the story.

It's only part way through. The victory is guaranteed. It's assured. And if you're on the side of Christ, all this verse belongs to you.

And it's a wonderful verse. And if at any time you're feeling down, you feel vulnerable, you feel apprehensive, you feel scared, you feel threatened, you feel overcome, go and say to the Lord,

Lord, remember, Lord, you've told me here that I'm a happy people.
I'm a happy because I've been saved by you. And Lord, you're my shield. You're my defender.
You're the sword of my triumph. The enemy that is threatening me just now is not going to succeed.
[26 : 26] Lord, I am going to overcome by you. What a reason tonight to thank the Lord. It's as we
said, the night of Thanksgiving. Well, we have so much reason here to praise and to thank the Lord.
Let us pray.