

Portraits of the Church (1) - The Church of the Living God

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Now, we're going to begin our worship today singing in Psalm number 57. Psalm 57, that's in the Scottish Psalter version. That's on page 288.

We're singing verses 5 to 11. Be thou exalted very high above the heavens, O God. Let thou thy glory be advanced o'er all the earth abroad.

My souls bow down, for they a net have laid my steps to snare into the pit which they have digged, for me they fallen are. My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, O God, I'll sing and praise.

My glory wake, wake, psaltery harp, myself I'll early raise. To the end of the psalm from verse 5, and we'll stand to sing. Be thou exalted very high above the heavens, O God.

Let thou thy glory be advanced o'er all the earth abroad.

[1 : 19] My soul's burden, for they a net have laid my steps to snare.

into the pit which they have digged, for me they fallen are.

My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, O God, I'll sing and praise.

My glory wake, wake, sultry harp, myself I'll early raise.

I'll praise thee among the people, Lord. Among nations sing with I.

[2 : 40] For great to heaven thy mercy is, thy truth is to the sky.

O Lord, exalted be thy name above the heavens to stand.

Do thou thy glory far and land above the sea and land.

Now we're going to call on the Lord in prayer. Let's all join together in prayer. Our eternal and gracious God, you have reminded us in these words we have been singing in your praise, that we exist to glorify your name, that you gather us together in such a way as this, to exalt you and to lift up your holy name and worship.

We know, Lord, that this is our great privilege to be able to do so and to recognize that we, O Lord, have this incumbent upon us, that we should glorify you and enjoy you as the chief end of our creation.

[4 : 14] We thank you today, O Lord, that you have brought us into being and sustained us in our being from day to day. The Word tells us that it is in you we live and move and have our being.

And we give thanks for the recognition of this, Lord, as you reveal yourself to us and as you come to draw our minds in your Word to that great teaching about your eternal existence and about your relationship with your people and with the creation itself.

And we thank you today that we gather here to worship you in a way that willingly would give to you the praise and the honor and the glory that is due to you. We thank you for your Word to guide us, for your Word to teach us, Lord, about those great issues of this life and of eternity, especially of these matters of eternal salvation for your own people.

The eternal life that you lay out for us in your Word that we find deposited especially in the Lord Jesus Christ, your Son. We thank you today, Lord, that we come in His name.

And we thank you, Lord, our Father, that you sent Him as your Son into this world so that He might take the sin of His people and die the death that they deserve, that death which we all deserve, but also as a great atonement for the sin of your people.

[5 : 39] And we thank you today that we can come expectantly, believing that you are here and believing that you have delight in blessing your Word to your people. And, Lord, we ask that your blessing today will be known by us, that our hearts will truly be quickened and gladdened, like the heart of the psalmist in whose words we have read and in whose words we find such a great challenge for ourselves to have our hearts lifted up and quickened at the thought of coming into your presence.

We pray, Lord, today for each of us here and for our life as a congregation. We pray, O Lord, that you would bless us in this week that we have entered when so many activities are anticipated by us.

We pray that you would guide us and bless us through these, each and every one of them, services of worship, other meetings in association with the congregation, with the young people, and with others alike.

We pray, Lord, in anticipation of the induction this coming Friday that you would bless this occasion. We pray that you would bless Mr. MacLeod as he anticipates preaching and presiding over the service.

We pray especially for Calimurdo and for his family as they come to join us and as we anticipate him becoming our assistant minister. We thank you, Lord, for the prospect.

[7 : 06] We pray that you would grant your blessing to them as a family. We pray that as they settle among us and as the children settle into school, we ask, O Lord, that you would bless them with this new chapter beginning in their lives.

And we ask that you would make yourself known to them and give them peace in their hearts as they take this step into a new chapter in their experience. And we pray in anticipation, Lord, of their presence with us and of Calimurdo's ministry and Johan as well that a great blessing will follow and that we will see further steps taken by us under his ministry as a congregation into further avenues of service for the Lord.

We pray your blessing for the North East congregation that he has left. We ask, O Lord, that you would grant your blessing to them through the gospel as they continue to serve you and testify to you there.

We thank you for their willingness to part with their minister, though we know that this was a great wrench for them. Nevertheless, Lord, you have in the past so many times blessed such things to congregations and to individuals, and we pray that that will be so for them.

We pray your blessing too for our young people and our children today asking as we come to the end of the Sunday school session and as we come to the prize giving later, Lord, we pray your blessing to follow these months of teaching and of fellowship and of being together in the various classes and activities that they have engaged in.

[8 : 41] We ask, Lord, for each and every family, as well as the children themselves, that you bless them in their homes as parents and grant, Lord, that they may continue to flourish under the gospel.

And we ask that as we give thanks for their participation in the congregation and for their being so much a part of the congregation's life, Lord, that you would continue to lay your good hand of blessing upon them.

Remember those who have given of their time to teach in the Sunday school, to look after the creche and the tweenies. Lord, we pray for them too and give thanks for their service.

We give thanks for their willingness and for their talents used in this way. And we ask, O Lord, that we may appreciate more and more all who give of their time so willingly to help in the different ways in which the life of the congregation is manifest in our community.

Remember us now, we pray, as we continue here in your presence today. We ask that you would bless your word to us. We pray that you'd open up our minds so that we will understand further the things of your salvation and of your kingdom.

[9 : 50] We pray for the world at large in which we live. We pray today for our own communities. We pray for our schools as they come to the end of another session. We give thanks for the education of our children.

We pray for the teachers and for the head teachers. We pray for the education authority. We pray for all who are involved, Lord, in the instruction that our children receive by way of support teaching and by way of other services that are given in our schools.

Lord, we pray that we may give thanks to thee constantly for the provision that you continue to make for us. We ask, too, that you would bless our nation at this time.

Lord, we acknowledge so much that has been done and is done in departure from your ways, things which we know are offensive to you. We ask, O Lord, that you'd be merciful to us.

We ask that you'd grant to us through your Holy Spirit a spirit of repentance in all our hearts so as to turn to the Lord and pray for ourselves as a people, for our governments and for those in authority in different ways, in places of influence and authority in our land.

[11 : 04] Be pleased to bless us, we pray, and in your pity remember us, though we deserve not any mercy from you. Bless the world in which we live. Bless the troubled spots of the world in Yemen, in Ukraine, in different places where war rages, where terrorism is rife.

Bless the people of Afghanistan in the wake of this terrible earthquake, having so few resources. O Lord, our God, provide for them, we pray. Grant at this time that you'd show your compassion and your love in providing for them.

Help us to open our hearts and to open our resources to send them relief. O Lord, we ask that you would continue with us here. Bless us and hear our prayer and pardon our sins for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Let's continue our worship singing again in Psalm 40 this time. Psalm 40 and sing Psalms on page 50. Singing verses 1 to 5.

I waited long upon the Lord. He heard my cry and turned to me. He raised me from the slimy pit and from the mire He pulled me free.

[12 : 16] He set my feet on solid rock, a place to stand both firm and broad. He put a new song in my mouth, a joyful hymn of praise to God.

Psalm 40 verses 1 to 5 to God's praise. I waited long upon the Lord.

I waited long upon the Lord. He heard my cry and turned to me.

He raised me from the slimy pit and from the mire.

He pulled me free. He set my feet on solid rock, a place to stand both firm and broad.

[13 : 23] He put a new song in my mouth, a joyful hymn of praise to God.

Many will look with godly fear, and on the Lord alone rely.

Blessed are they who trust the Lord, who shall not proud and gods that lie.

The wonders you have done, O Lord, how many and how great they are.

Your plans for us are far beyond. God's word is now, our heart to now, our Lord declare.

[14 : 54] Now reading of Scripture, God's word is today in the book of Acts. The book of Acts in chapter 19. We're going to read from verse 21 through to the end of the chapter.

Acts chapter 19 at verse 21. Now after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way.

For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together with the workmen in similar trades and said, Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.

And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

[16 : 14] And there is danger, not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.

When they heard this, they were enraged and were crying out, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. So the city was filled with confusion, and they rushed together into the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.

But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And some, even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theatre.

Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward, and Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd.

But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. And when the town clerk had quietened the crowd, he said, Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky?

[17 : 45] Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess.

If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another.

But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we are really in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.

And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. And that forms the background to the text we're going to look at later from 1 Timothy.

We'll sing once again to his praise before we turn to that passage, and this time in Psalm 122. Psalm 122, again in St. Psalms, page 169.

[18 : 46] To the Lord's house they were calling, and with joy I went with them. Now at last our feet are standing in your gate, Jerusalem. See, Jerusalem like a city built compactly, close and strong.

That is where the tribes assemble, tribes which to the Lord belong. And so on, we'll sing the whole of the Psalm, these verses, To the Lord's house they were calling.

To the Lord's house they were calling, and with joy I went with them.

Now at last our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem.

See, Jerusalem like a city built compactly, close and strong.

[19 : 51] That is where the tribes assemble, tribes which to the Lord belong.

To the Lord's name praise they offer, as for Israel decreed.

There are set the thrones for judgment, thrones of David's royal seed.

Pray for Zion's peace and safety. May your friends securely dwell.

Peace within your walls continue. Strength within your citadel.

[20 : 59] For the sake of friends and brothers, peace be in you, I will say.

For the sake of our God's temple, I seek your prosperity.

Now if you turn with me please to the first letter of Paul to Timothy, and chapter 3.

We're looking today at verse 15. First Timothy chapter 3, and we'll read from verse 14.

Verse 14. Verse 14. Verse 14. Verse 14. Verse 14.

Verse 14. I hope to come to see you soon, but I'm writing these things to you, so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.

[22 : 19] Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

But especially these words you find today in verse 15, a description of the church, which we have as the church of the living God.

God willing, we're going to begin a series of studies on the church, but scripture portraits of the church as the title we've given to the series.

I don't know how long it'll last for. God willing, probably something like 10 or 12 studies because we're following the passages in the Bible that give us portraits of the church. In other words, descriptions such as the description you find in this verse itself.

In fact, there are three descriptions of the church in this verse. The one we're looking at today is the church of the living God. You can see also that it's called the household of God.

[23 : 24] And thirdly, it's called a pillar and buttress of truth. And these three descriptions, each of them, very picturesque. They set out by way of a portrait of the church, certain things that are so true of the church that we need to know and appreciate for ourselves.

And to have a biblical view and understanding of the church is a truly important matter for us. There are so many different views of the church, what the church is, what the church should be like, what the church should be doing.

Currently across our society and throughout the world, it's really extremely important for ourselves that we know what the Bible says about the church, that we keep to the biblical picture the church gives us or descriptions that the Bible gives us, rather, of the church so that we have in our understanding a biblical view of the church, a view of the church that is indeed as God has set it out for us in the Scriptures.

And so we're going to examine these various descriptions that you find. You have descriptions like the body of Christ, the bride of Christ. These three descriptions you find in this passage itself.

God's people are called the light of the world, a city set on a hill. And so we're going to see various descriptions like that that are very much portraits of the church. And we'll see some of the teaching that's built into these descriptions so that we can come and appreciate ourselves what it means to belong to the church, how important it is to belong to the church, what are the advantages of belonging to the church.

[25 : 02] And today we're looking at the church as the church of the living God. And there are two things within that that stand out. First of all, the word church itself.

And then now it's described as the church of the living God. So there's the word church. And then our second point will be the church as it's described, the church of the living God.

Now the word church is, as you know, frequently found throughout the New Testament. But you must never think of the church in terms of a building or a structure. I know we do speak of the church in those terms, but it's so important that we actually always think of the church as people, not mortar, not buildings, not bricks and stone, though we describe the church, are you going to church?

The church is the people. What is Stornoway Free Church? Stornoway Free Church is not this building. This is the building in which Stornoway Free Church regularly meets in order to come together to worship God.

So that's the very foundational matter for us, firstly, to remember. The New Testament never uses, as far as I'm aware, the New Testament never uses the word church for any building, such as the building in which we are today gathered to worship the Lord.

[26 : 30] Throughout the New Testament, you actually have the word church used for the people that are, as we'll see, called by God to exist in the world as His own worshipping, believing people.

So when we say to people, are you coming to church with me? If they think that the church means the building, you have to say to them, well, what I mean is, are you coming to gather with us the church in the building in which we regularly worship?

Because we can get into so many wrong ideas if we just confine our thinking of the church and what the word church means to a building or a structure of that kind.

Now, the word that's used in the New Testament mostly for the church is the word in Greek, *ekklesia*. And you can tell from the sound of that word, it's very closely related to the word *ecclesiastic*, which we use as an English word to describe some things to do with the church or a person belonging to the church.

You can find the same in different languages. The word in Gaelic is *Eglis*. The word in French is *l'église*. You can see how like that is to *ekklesia*. And the *ekklesia* in the New Testament, the word for translated church is a word that literally means the ones called out.

[27 : 51] And you can see immediately that refers to people. It refers to people that have been called out by God to be His people. Different ways in which being called out is described.

But that's really what essentially it means. They are called out and we can see now where they're called out from. Well, you remember that Jesus said of His disciples that they were not of the world that He had called them out of the world.

And that's the same idea you find in the word *ecclesiastic*, as the called out ones. You today are the called out people. You are called out from the world around you so that they are aware today that you are gathered here today as a worshipping people.

You are actually different in that respect to the world that does not worship God. You are called out by God to be a distinct group of people in the world that are associated with the worship of God, associated with believing in God, and all that that entails.

You are separated from the world in that way. But not only does God call His people out from the world, and we'll see in the course of our studies some of what that actually means in practice, they are called out from the world, but they are also called together.

[29 : 10] They are the called out ones, but they are called together, to be together as a group that actually have the name of God or something associated with God and His worship attached to them.

God never calls anyone or any people out from a situation without calling them into a new situation. We read in Psalm 40, He took me, said the psalmist, out of a fearful, slimy pit.

But He didn't just say, He took me out of the pit, He then placed my feet upon a rock. Think back to the Old Testament where the people of Israel gathered there in Egypt as slaves in Egypt and burdened by the persecutors in Egypt, and God came and rescued them from that situation.

He called them out under the leadership of Moses from that situation in Egypt. Now, that's a picture for you, really, of God calling His people out of a certain situation, but He didn't just call them out of there and leave them scattered any old way without organization, without order.

He called them out and He called them together. Under Moses, He called them together to be a people that were following the ways of the Lord, although sadly, like ourselves, they failed in many respects in that regard.

[30 : 33] But this is what they were. They were no longer in Egypt. They had been called out of that place. They had been called out of that situation. And these circumstances and called together to be the Lord's people, to have the Lord's name and to be in covenant with the Lord who rescued them.

That's what we are engaged in today. That's why we're called out and called together. Now, being called out and called together, which really amounts to the same thing in essence in terms of the result of it, it has both challenge and privilege, privilege and challenge attached to being called out and called together to be the people of God.

If we take these in turn, you can see something of the privilege of it and something of the challenge of it as well. The privilege, you could say, is the privilege of being, as 1 Peter puts it, called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

This is what's happening all the way through the letters of the New Testament, whether it's Paul or Peter, whether it's to Timothy or to a church that you find them written, this is constantly the emphasis that these people of God that are being written to are people that have been called out by God out of the world to be the people of God, to be together, the people of God and the witnesses of God called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

And it's only after you come out of darkness that you realize that you were in darkness, spiritually and morally, I'm saying, because it's as the Lord opens our hearts, as the Lord gives us a true understanding of ourselves and of Himself and of what life is like and what salvation is, it's only then that we begin to realize as God works in our hearts, as God individually comes and as we get to grips with His truth through His own Spirit working in us.

[32 : 31] It's then that we realize that we thought we were actually in the light, we thought that we were in the clear, we thought you understood things properly until God says, no, I'm calling you out of darkness, out of spiritual darkness.

And in Ephesians, we'll come to refer to Ephesians in a minute, but in Ephesians, Paul actually says to the Ephesians not only that they were in darkness, but that they were darkness.

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. You were once darkness. That's what they were. That's what they were constituted as, as fallen, sinful human beings like we all are until God comes and rescues us and brings us to see the light as we often have it put and brings us into the light.

So there's the first aspect of the privilege, called out of darkness into His marvelous light. Or take another way of describing it, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, God, he says, has called you into the fellowship of His Son.

That's Jesus Christ. To have fellowship in the New Testament sense of it means much more than just knowing somebody casually or having an acquaintance with someone.

[33 : 51] Fellowship in the New Testament really is all about sharing. Sharing in or sharing with or sharing out. And what Paul is saying to the Corinthians is, this is your great privilege.

God has called you into the sharing of His Son, sharing life together in His Son. He has called you into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ.

There is no greater privilege. There is no greater privilege than to be called to be joined to Christ, to have fellowship with Jesus Christ, to know the Savior personally for ourselves.

That's what God calls us to. But He calls us to that just not only individually, but to be a people who together enjoy what it means to be in fellowship with Christ, who help one another through the experience of the life that Jesus gives us.

And the difficulties that we face, the challenges, as we'll see in a minute, of living like that in obedience to Him in this world. But that's our great privilege. He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

[35 : 07] He has called us into the fellowship of His own Son. Now today, I have to ask myself, you're preaching this gospel, you're preaching these truths to these people, is this what is true of yourself?

And of course, I have to analyze that for myself, but you have to do that too. Because being called out by God to be together a covenant people, which we are here today, is not the same thing as to know Jesus saving me for ourselves.

And within the covenant people of God, within the called out people of God, there exist people who are born again, and there exist people who have the privileges of the gospel, but who are not born again, who still don't know Jesus as their own Savior.

That's why I'm saying that's why it's incumbent upon us, as those who are called to preach the gospel, to set before you that very important distinction, the great privilege of belonging to the church, of being within the covenant body of the church, being a member in that sense of the covenant people of God.

You have to then ask yourself, but do I know Jesus for myself? Have I come to embrace Him, to welcome Him, to receive Him into my own life?

[36 : 25] As I hear all these things about Him and about what His church is and what His church is like and what God has described His church as, it's for you and for me today to look at our relationship to Christ, to Jesus and to make sure that you know Him, that you know Him personally, that you know Him savingly, that you know Him in such a way as enjoys the privilege of being called out of darkness to be joined to Christ Himself.

But of course, that means there's a challenge as well along with the privilege. It's always like that, isn't it? I don't know if you can think of any privilege that you have in this life that doesn't have a challenge associated with it or along with it.

Certainly the case in the Christian life and the challenges must never obscure the magnificence of the privilege. That's not why they're highlighted for us but so that, as Jesus did say to the disciples, we will have a realistic view of what a Christian is and what a Christian life is like.

It's not to put us off. It's not so that we'll say, well, that's not for me but it's to say, well, that is for me but I have to recognize that there's a challenge in following Jesus.

That it's not the easiest life at many times but nevertheless it's one that's above all others a privileged life. There's the challenge of living as the light of the world as Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples, to His listeners.

[38 : 00] You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Let your light so shine before people so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Now, that's a great challenge and it's something that I'm sure we all have to accept of ourselves we fall short of and we all have to confess to some degree or other that our light is not as bright as it could be or should be, that we are not even as a congregation together shining with the clarity that we ought to have as we are placed by God in our community in order to be His covenant people but nevertheless it's something that we recognize by the grace of God we are called to do and we are called to be the light of the world and we are called to proclaim as Peter put it in association we called out of darkness into His marvelous light the words before that were that you might proclaim the excellencies of the one who has called you that's why we exist as a called out people to proclaim and it's not just proclaiming in the sense of preaching

Peter was talking there not just to those who preached the gospel but to the church that was then scattered and under persecution and he was trying to encourage them with this letter and not to turn away from the Lord to keep looking to Him to draw their strength from Him to be encouraged in Him so that you proclaim the excellencies you manifest you show clear evidence of who your Lord is the way you live you proclaim His excellencies the features of the Lord's own person and the Lord's work in your salvation that's the church not a building the ecclesia the called out and called together people who as such have a great privilege and who have challenges that they must meet in the grace and in the strength of God who promises to give you strength in order to face the challenges so that's the church but then you see it's the church of the living God and this is really another interesting aspect of the description or the portrait that we read in the Ephesians and Timothy was left as you can see in fact from chapter 1 and verse 3 there

Timothy was left by Paul for some time at Ephesus he says I urged when I was going to Macedonia you to remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine and then in chapter 4 you find immediately after the description here of the church Paul is telling Timothy well look these days are going to come the Spirit has specifically mentioned this some will depart from the faith devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and so on and so on and he was wanting Timothy to be very much aware that this was coming and to be prepared for that and especially to be prepared through the truth of God for himself and to know the church of God and what it was and why it was the way God had described and in the book of Acts as we read Ephesus was the place where the great statue of Artemis which sometimes is called Diana used to be the name in the older translations

Diana but the Greek name would be Artemis that's how the ESV has retained the name the same thing Diana the Artemis of the Ephesians and we read there about the riot or the near riot that took place after those who were losing their trade because people who were associated with producing things for the paganistic worship of Ephesus they were losing work because people were turning to the Lord and there wasn't the same demand for these artifacts and so they saw that they were being deprived of a part of their income at least so they tried to organize a protest and a riot things which we're not ourselves unfamiliar with and now age sadly but they were quietened eventually and they came to actually listen to Alexander who gave advice to the crowd that's the context in which Timothy was actually working as a gospel worker as a preacher of the gospel as a companion of Paul the

[42 : 45] Apostle that's the background to what he's saying to Timothy in terms of his ministry in 1 Timothy and as you think about that background think about the challenge that that actually that provided here is this whole Ephesian city virtually coming out in protest and saying great is Artemis of the Ephesians a massive crowd swell of opposition to the gospel and yet that's where Paul is saying that's where the church of God is placed that's where you Timothy have to minister the gospel to these people that have turned to the Lord and come to know the Lord that's your business to actually tell them about Jesus and tell them about the great difference between this Artemis of the Ephesians and the church that you belong to what is the great difference well in Ephesians there in Acts rather we read that the description was that this place this temple of Diana or of Artemis was the place where the memory to and the statue of Artemis was actually kept and they were the custodians if you like of this image of Artemis and that was their great privilege as they saw it to be as the pagan people of Ephesus they were chosen they saw it in terms of Artemis their idol to have been the people who were chosen to look after this great statue the one of the wonders of the world and here is Paul saying to

Timothy here is your privilege and the privilege of you Christians in Ephesus or wherever that the church you belong to is the church of the living God there is not a statue that is meaningless and cold and hopeless it is the living God there is not a temple as made with human hands in which Artemis or this figure of Artemis has been deposited and carefully looked after and worshipped and idolized you are the church of the living God and instead of a cold statue in your midst you have God himself you have the living God that's why you are described as that's why he is describing them as the church of the living God now you think of yourselves today as the church of God as we said in the early part of our study but you are the church of the living God the church of the living

God because the living God himself has chosen to live in and among his people that's what makes it an immense privilege as well as a great challenge to ourselves to live to his glory but he's the church we are the church of the living God in contrast Paul is saying here to those of Ephesus who gloried in Artemis and in the worship and pagan religion of Artemis and remember how Jesus taught about the coming of the Holy Spirit after he himself had gone back to heaven and in John's gospel especially he taught the disciples of some of the aspects of that and what that would actually result in and in John chapter 14 we have really remarkable words about how God would come to live in his people through the

Holy Spirit how he would come to make his people his home just remind you of what that says in John 14 and beginning at verse 15 if you love me you will keep my commandments and I will ask the father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever even the spirit of truth spirit with a capital S the Holy Spirit whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him you know him for he dwells with you and will be in you but then he says I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you later on he then says whoever has my commandments and keeps them here is who loves me and he who loves me will be loved by my father and I will love him and manifest myself to him and Judas not Judas Iscariot but he said to him other Judas said Lord how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world

Jesus said if anyone loves me he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come and make our home with him you see the remarkable thing that's happening there in that passage Jesus is teaching about the coming of the Holy Spirit which happened as recorded in Acts 2 at the day of Pentecost but in the coming of the Holy Spirit you have more than the Holy Spirit himself the third person of the triune God because Jesus is saying I will come again to you I'm not going to leave you as orphans and he's also saying my father will love you and then the fact that the living God has made a house for himself in his covenant people and that today the three persons of the Godhead the Father the

[48 : 33] Son and the Holy Spirit have come to take up residence in his own church as the church of the living God what conclusions should we draw from that well first of all that our life must be one of living in awe and reverence for this God we're in the presence of God indeed the Lord's people are the home that God is building for himself he is using them as taking them as his dwelling place and that means we learn just like the Old Testament had to learn in regard to the temple and the holy of holies in the temple because God was there because the presence of God was manifested there you had to watch your step you had to be very careful how you behaved and this is one of the descriptions here we'll see next time or one of the next times behave how you ought to behave in the household of

God which is the church of the living God the fact that the living God lives among us means we have to respect that presence and it's not just respecting that presence as we are gathered here on the Lord's day or at other times when we come together individually it's true of us as well because God lives in the heart of each of his people and as we come to realize that to give him all the reverence and the awe and the love and the respect that's due to him now some people have an idea that that's really an enemy of rejoicing and of joy that all these things about respect and awe and reverence and holiness that these things are really contrary to are not really at all in step with what the Bible is saying about rejoicing and joy and experiencing all of those issues as well in our hearts it's not like that reverence for

God is no enemy of rejoicing awe and respect for God includes love for God and love for God is not an enemy of knowing the joy and the rejoicing and the gladness of heart of being a Christian of belonging to the church of being privileged to know that this is the church of the living God you know the better we know God some people might think the better we know God the closer we would be to God the more awe and respect we would have for him the more joy would go out of our lives that's what the world will tell you that's what caricatures of the church will tell you you don't want to belong to these people who believe the Bible you want to belong to these people who really live a very dude and negative and a very narrow focused life well is it narrow focused really to know

God as the living God is it narrow focused to have your mind opened to all the prospects of eternity with God is that a narrow way of life is that something that really would be an enemy of rejoicing and of joy of course it isn't to belong to the church of the living God is something in which we ought to rejoice and find our greatest pleasures in contrast to the pleasure of the world and there's all on reverence and respect and love but there's also along with being a part of a member of the church of the living God God there is secondly a concern for the unsaved as the people of God the church of the living God this congregation of the church of God part of what follows that description is that we have a concern for the unsaved for those who are out there and don't know

Jesus and don't want to know Jesus most of them many of them well in 1st Timothy you find in chapter 2 and verse 4 a description about God himself saying that he's urging for prayers to be made for kings for all in positions that we may live lead a peaceful and quiet life for this is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior and then you follow you find these words following who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth again remarkable words have you heard somebody saying to you well God's not really interested in the likes of me you'll say but this is God's word he says he desires all people to be saved there's a whole lot of theology packed into that a whole lot of difficult theology packed into that when we realize that not all people ultimately will be saved but that does not interfere with the emphasis in the text and the emphasis in the text is that for all of us gathered here and indeed for all people it is the desire of

[54 : 03] God that they will be saved that they will come to know himself that they will come to the knowledge of the truth and we'll see that part of the description of verse 15 relates to the truth the church is the pillar and buttress of truth what we are to be in the support of God's truth in this world in which we're placed so there's the church of the living God in the context of Ephesus living in contrast to the cult of Artemis and in the context of today the church of the living God has to live in contrast to the cult of the world and the cults of the world whether formal or otherwise because whatever form it takes there is some kind of Artemis in the heart of every human being naturally that includes you and me John Calvin described the human heart and its unsaved state as a factory of idols we worship something or other even if it's not

God and what Paul is saying is the church of the living God is a contrast to the cult in Ephesus or the cult of the world world it's a privilege of belonging to this church of the living God to love him to respect him to worship him to serve him to speak for him to deliver his gospel to a needy world may God bless these thoughts on his word to us today now we're going to conclude our service this morning and our concluding words are from Psalm 47 Psalm 47 and this is in the Scottish Psalter page 272 verses 5 to 9 God is with shouts gone up the Lord with trumpets sounding high sing praise to God sing praise sing praise praise to our king sing ye for

God is king of all the earth with knowledge praise express God rules the nations God sits on his throne of holiness Psalm 47 verses 5 to 9 God is with shouts gone up the Lord with trumpets out the high sing praise to God sing praise praise express praise to our king singing for God is king of all the earth with knowledge praise express

God God rules the nations God sits on his throne of holiness the princes of the people are assembled willingly in love the God of he in Abraham they who the people be for what the shields are to defend the earth the earth our only is great to the

Lord be long he exalted greatly is now I won't go to the door this morning because we want to get to the hall as quickly as possible for the prize giving so please just make your way there as I said you're all welcome to attend prize again if you can at all be a great encouragement to the children so we'll just pray and ask for a blessing and the refreshments and close with the benediction our gracious and loving God we thank you for belonging to your church in this world for the privileges and the benefits and the pleasures that brings us we ask your blessing now on the prize giving ceremony and on the children especially as they participate in it and we give thanks for them and we pray that your blessing will rest upon us throughout this day bless the food we are to receive granted

[59 : 51] Lord we pray and may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore Amen Amen Amen
TERRUP more in Amen Those par■■ want to serve ■■■ Mat lost as a