

Guest Speaker Jeff Hodgson

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Preacher: Jeff Hodgson

[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

At Cornerstone Church in leading a community group back in the early 2010s.

So Jeff has been a pastor at Cornerstone for a number of years. I can't count them all. But over the past probably 10 years or so, he's been serving as a bivocational or part-time pastor.

Jeff is a commercial airline pilot. He does that on the side while he serves at Cornerstone, counsels numerous folks, and gives greatly of himself, he and his wife, in serving the church there.

Some of you that are here this morning may not be aware of the fact that Trinity Grace is a church plant out of Cornerstone Church. And during the time since our inception in 2018, in October of that year, Jeff has served us as a provisional elder pastor for us.

[1 : 33] Because of our commitment to having a plural eldership, we were not able to do that until there were others that were raised up within our congregation. So for four years, Jeff has served us very faithfully in that way.

And we are greatly, greatly appreciative for all that he's done, and as well as for his friendship to many of us here. So join me in welcoming Jeff Hodgson.

Good morning. I think this is my third Trinity Grace venue to preach at.

I keep chasing you all around. You keep chasing your places, but I keep finding you. Each of these places has been very different, and yet each of these places is in a way the same.

Each has struck me with the kindness of the Lord's generous vision and the faithfulness of this congregation to prepare and gather at whatever place the Lord provides.

[2 : 47] You have made a home out of wherever you find yourself, and that is a great tribute to the fellowship that you enjoy as a local church. It is truly a pleasure and an honor to serve you and to be with you again this morning.

This morning, I have the great privilege to speak to you a bit about Psalm 119. When Walt told me that this was the next psalm that you're doing in your psalm series, I was very excited.

This psalm has become just a treasure trove for me as I read the psalmist's verses of joyous communion with the Lord.

I won't be reading all of Psalm 119 today. Maybe you came this morning knowing we were doing Psalm 119, and perhaps knowing how long it is, you are now rejoicing at hearing me say that.

It is, in fact, the longest chapter in the Bible, longer than some entire books, and probably best to leave reading the whole thing to you in your quiet times.

[3 : 59] Plus, I have some other verses that I'd like to look at as well. But what I do want to do is highlight several verses from 119, which speak to some of the things racing through the psalmist's mind as he considers the Lord.

Things that come from his gripping and comforting and strengthening communion with God. He has found communion with God, and it fills his thoughts and has given him a song.

So what an amazing thing to be ministered to by Almighty God this morning as we consider his gracious word. And so I'd like to take a moment to pray that he would have mercy on us and open his word to us once again.

Lord God, thank you. Thank you for your mercy that we can gather this morning. That we can come freely to this place to worship you and to receive from you again.

You love to bless your people. And so thank you, Lord, that you will bless your people again. I pray that you would give us hearts that are soft, minds that are open to hear the word of God and to meet the risen, living God once again.

[5 : 27] And may it transform us for your glory. We pray in Jesus' mighty name. Well, we respond differently to different kinds of encounters in this life, don't we?

Some encounters, like a friendly exchange at the grocery store, leave us pretty much unaffected. But others are different. Coming around the corner and meeting a grizzly bear when you're out hiking in Glacier National Park might affect you more significantly.

A couple months back, I met Daniel and Anna McGraw in Chicago's O'Hare Airport as they were returning from their trip to Glacier and I was commuting home from one of my trips.

And while we were catching up, they were telling me about thinking through the possibility of meeting a bear along the hiking trail. So what they did was they sang hymns and worship songs at the top of their lungs and made all kinds of other racket to alert the bears that they were out there and alert them to their approach so they wouldn't take them by surprise.

Now, I've not heard Daniel sing, but that might be alarming enough to scare away bears. I don't know. Conversely, maybe hearing Anna sing evangelized a few.

[6 : 54] I'm not sure of that either. But the point is that they were very aware that meeting a bear was going to get their attention, maybe change their lives.

Some different kinds of encounters with the Lord affect people differently as well. And the Bible is full of these different kinds of encounters and the effect that they had on the people involved.

If you have your Bible and you want to flip to Isaiah 6, I think we'll also have it up on the board as well in case you don't have the scripture with you.

But here is Isaiah's encounter with God in the heavenly throne room. I'll begin in verse 1. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.

And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

[8 : 08] And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

And I said, Woe is me, for I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. A person's encounter with the glorified Lord would be so overwhelming that it might even make him despair, being so very aware of his own sin and unworthiness to be in a holy God's presence.

Woe is me indeed. C.S. Lewis once said that there are two things we're unable to bear in this life.

One, the full display of the majesty of God's glory, and the other, the full display of the wickedness of our sin. Isaiah clearly thought his vision was going to destroy him.

[9 : 27] If you'll also turn to Matthew 17, there's another encounter. Peter, James, and John were brought to the mountain and shown a glimpse of Jesus glorified.

So Matthew 17, we'll read this, and the results of their encounter was stupefying to them as well. And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them. And his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with him.

And Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.

[10 : 41] Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise and have no fear.

So what do you do if you encounter a glimpse of God glorified? Maybe you're brought to an absolute end of yourself, like Isaiah. Maybe you say something goofy, like Peter.

Peter, this is so great, Lord. We should turn this into a camping trip. We can have s'mores and build a campfire, and it will be, hey, enough.

Listen to him. This is my beloved son. I just, I love Peter because he really helps me when I say dumb things. And I think, perhaps your encounters with God are a little less intense than Isaiah's and the apostles.

But I argue that they are no less significant. The question really is whether we see them for how significant they are.

[11 : 57] The experience many of us have with our communion with God can seem sporadic, maybe distracted by the busyness and cares of this life, or even at times discouraging when he doesn't answer our prayers in the way that we would want.

But I think we can hope for an experience of communion with God, encountering God that's far better than that.

So if we recognize that we're not Old Testament prophets or New Testament apostles, what should we hope for or even expect in our communion with God?

What would it sound like if you were walking along through life in this vibrant communion with the Lord? What would be the kinds of things that you would say?

The writer of Psalm 119, guided by the Holy Spirit, has recorded his thoughts and has shared his words of wonder at the perfect love of God displayed in the ways that he has been saved, God's perfect wisdom in the way he has been led and instructed, and God's perfect power in the way that he has been upheld.

[13 : 23] He has encountered God and this is his song. The wonderful news for us is that the Lord intends for this to be our song as well.

This isn't just him that this song is for. We may not be Old Testament prophets or New Testament apostles, but we are the redeemed people of God, invited to experience God.

And I think the main point for today is that because God has revealed himself to us, we do have a joyous song to sing.

So let's hear the psalmist respond to the categories of God's perfection. First, his perfect love. Second, his perfect wisdom.

And third, his perfect power. And see if these things don't map onto our lives as well. I believe you'll see that they do. We begin with God's perfect love because it's the basis for all of our interactions with God.

[14 : 35] Apart from God's love, where would we be? Point number one, God is perfect in love. We're going to hear a few exclamations from the psalmist as he reflects on the love of God and what that means, but first I want to start off with verse one.

Because verse one is pretty important. Psalm 119, verse one. Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.

Now be careful with verse one. Verse one is a statement about identity. It's not a statement about performance.

There are certain people whose identity is blessed. It's not the same as saying that someone is lucky. It isn't the same as saying that someone has it easy.

In this, the psalmist is saying it's who they are. So how is this even so? We need to think this through carefully. Who can actually say that their way is blameless after all?

[15 : 54] Has anyone lived perfectly? Has anyone never sinned? None of us can say that about ourselves with integrity.

But God can declare it to be how he views a person. we can be called blameless and reconciled to a holy God.

That can be our identity. And the only ways for us to be reconciled to a holy God is for God to take away from us our guilt and our shame from our sin.

we have broken the law of God. We are guilty. We have been stained by the things we have done and the things done to us.

We are ashamed. But God has fixed all that. He sent his son to live the perfect life that we could not live and suffer the penalty for our sins that we could not pay.

[17 : 07] Because of the love of God the Father credits the blamelessness of the Son as ours. He views me as being righteous.

He has saved me. He has loved me. As far as the Lord is concerned because of the gospel of Jesus Christ verse 1 is mine to proclaim.

We are the people called blessed because we are in Christ. It is not a human performance statement.

It is an identity statement. It is an identity in the love and mercy of God kind of statement. Because of the love of God he has poured out his favor upon us.

He has given himself to us that we might be in communion with him to give us the treasure in the field to welcome us into the kingdom.

[18 : 21] What love what mercy. This is the meaning of being blessed. And so the rest of the verses follow on from verse 1.

Here is more of what the psalmist has to say. You have made me hope. Your promise gives me life. The Lord is my portion.

You have dwelt well with your servant. I am yours. You are near, O Lord. my lips will pour forth praise.

My tongue will sing of your word. These are the words of one who is loved.

When are those times in our lives when we're most aware of being loved? Are they not those times when someone has gone out of his or her way to truly do us good?

[19 : 22] Someone has given of himself or herself for my benefit. Someone saved us and made hope for the future possible.

Well, what if like a diligent and powerful protector, the Lord held you by the hand and snatched you from the dangers of this life?

When my son was a little boy, he and I were crossing the road at an intersection. And as we neared the middle of the lane, a truck turned quickly at the intersection to beat the oncoming traffic and was heading very fast toward us.

The driver apparently never looked to the lane he was turning into, never looked where he was going and he never saw us. I yanked my son up off the ground and leaped with him out of the way of the truck and later he said, I was walking and then I was flying.

What if we thought upon, immersed ourselves on, meditated upon our heavenly father's watchful and protective care, his strong and safe grip in our hands as we walk through life, and the ways that he has snatched us up and kept us for himself?

[21 : 03] What if we thought upon that over and over and over? Would we be more aware of the great love and mercy of God?

Our blessedness means therefore that we have hope, we have God's promises that give us life, we have access to God, he is our portion, he does good to us, we are his, we have a song to sing.

If we immerse ourselves in this amazing story of God's love, we have a great song indeed. He has loved us, he has saved us, and he hasn't left us on our own.

He now takes the rest of our lives to guide us, teach us, and grow us. Second point today, God is perfect in wisdom.

Most of us have played some sort of games in our lives, whether it be a team sport like soccer or something more individual like chess or checkers. And what makes competing in those things possible and enjoyable?

[22 : 21] The rules. Everyone playing soccer knows that only the goalie can touch the ball with his or her hands while it's in play. If players decided they'd rather pick up the ball and crash through the goalie into the net like some kind of football running back, it quits being a soccer game, doesn't it?

And beyond the rules, there are strategies and techniques to learn along the way that make us better players. I remember when my kids were little and they started playing soccer, and what do all little kids soccer teams do?

They all mass together around the ball in a big blob and nothing ever happens. But if the coach knows that spreading out and staying spread out makes passing the ball around and getting in and around and through defenders, then soccer starts getting more interesting, at least as interesting as soccer can be.

Our lives take on meaning and beauty and enjoyment when they are aligned with the rules of the one who created life.

Apart from his idea of how the game is played, things start getting weird. So what if, like an insightful and trusted counselor, the Lord sat with you and talked you through this often bewildering thing we call life?

[23 : 58] life? Explain the rules, how it all works. I love teachers. My father's career was as an engineering professor up at UT.

I'm still amazed by the things that he taught me and the countless students along the way. I'm amazed by his patience with me as he tried to teach me calculus. It didn't work.

the Lord has all of life's answers and he is patiently guiding us. So the question is, are we paying attention to the lessons that he is sending our way?

Haven't we had those occasions when we're especially aware that we're walking in step with the Lord's ways? It's a good feeling. And even if it had been in the midst of a difficult trial, wasn't there a satisfaction?

Wasn't there a peace? Wasn't there a joy that came with doing things his way? Is there not a profound sense of rightness when we can say, by your grace, Lord, I believe I'm following what you called me to do?

[25 : 17] Our psalmist seems to have that sense. Here are some of his words. In the way of your testimonies, I delight as much as in all riches.

Your testimonies are my delight. They are my counselors. My hope is in your rules. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.

The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

The unfolding of your words give light. It imparts understanding to the simple. Righteous are you, O Lord, and right are your rules.

The sum of your word is truth. The psalmist has encountered the living God and has heard his voice guiding him through the pages of Scripture.

[26 : 35] How kind of the Lord to give himself to us. How kind of the Lord to share his mind with us. how kind of the Lord to reveal to us the pathway of life.

We, whom God has had mercy upon, have been given the Holy Spirit so that we can believe God's word. We can see its truth that makes sense of all the complexities of this life.

love. We see in God's word the unfolding of all of redemptive history and it gives us hope in the promises of the future.

We have this patient teacher who shows us his ways so that we aren't playing this game not knowing the rules. And knowing the Lord's rules, his commandments, his testimonies, sets us free to live lives of meaning and joy.

No greater love than that displayed by God in the coming of the Savior to live and die as one of us so we might be reconciled to him. No greater wisdom than that revealed by God turning the wisdom of the world upside down and showing us the riches of life in the kingdom.

[28 : 00] But we have enemies and obstacles that stand in the way of our laying hold of that abundant life, don't we? Is there something or someone who can overcome?

Is there a power to help us? Because we can't seem to do it on our own. Let's think about God's perfect power and how the psalmist proclaims it.

Point three, God is perfect in power. A striking aspect of the psalms is how often they refer to the dangers we face from enemies who would harm us.

In fact, most of the psalms deal with that issue. And the wonderful, comforting news for us is that God is perfectly powerful and is able to save us to the uttermost.

Even from enemies who would overwhelm us. So hear our friend the psalmist again, whose life was not a rose garden of comfort and ease.

[29 : 13] His song is full of recounting difficult things. He writes, take me away from scorn and contempt.

my soul clings to the dust. My soul melts away for sorrow. This is my comfort in my affliction that your promise gives me life.

The insolent smear me with lies. How long must your servant endure? If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.

I am severely afflicted. Oh, Lord, give me life. Hold me up that I may be safe.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek your servant. God's word does not shrink away from the reality that this life is full of trials and tribulations.

[30 : 26] There are wicked people. There are diseases. There is death. There are dangers to our security and our safety all around.

So what trials are you most aware of today? Are there people who are threatening you or acting in a way that's causing you trouble or heartache?

Are you weighed down by grief because of the hard things you face? Loss, disappointment, unrealized hopes, and dreams?

Are you burdened by problems with your health, the health of loved ones? Or are you at that point in your life where you begin to take stock of how you've lived and you find yourself more aware of your shortcomings and your failures than anything else?

Well, what if, like your dearest and most intimate friend, the Lord came to you in your suffering and heard you and comforted you, brought you relief like no one else could?

[31 : 47] how many times have we experienced that peace that surpasses the world's understanding in the midst of our trials?

If you've added up all the dangers, toils, and snares that you've already faced in this life and imagined, what if all those difficulties were piled up right in front of me yet to endure?

Would I have the courage and the strength to make it through them? And yet, the Lord has carried you through them all.

Are we consciously aware of just how much he has helped us, his great power, throughout our lives? our friend, the psalmist, was a man like us.

He faced life with his joys and questions and challenges and he looked for explanations for the things that he experienced. And in his kindness, the Lord revealed to him these things.

[33 : 06] In the salvation and the communion the psalmist enjoyed, he recognized the love of God. As the Lord revealed more and more of his own character to him in the word of his law, the psalmist reveled in what he read.

He heard the Lord speaking to him, personally and specifically, and God's command and revelations only grew in beauty in his eyes.

In the guidance and instruction the Lord availed to him he experienced true wisdom. The Lord answered his questions and refuted the false claims of the world.

In his immersion into God's word, he glimpsed a marvelous treasure that even to this day, he is still enthralled with.

our psalmist friend is in heaven still amazed at what he is experiencing in his communion with God.

[34 : 18] We will never exhaust the infinite beauty and majesty of the Lord. And each time we open our Bibles and behold wondrous things, we're only just getting a sneak peek.

in the protection and provision the Lord afforded him, he met a power that overcame the fears and the threats that he faced.

Enemies abounded for him, but he was able to live his life in contentment and courage. Not because of his grit or willpower, but because he knew the mighty arm of the Lord was with him.

the Lord's word promised him help in time of need. It was in those promises he hoped, and in their fulfillment he rejoiced.

Even unto the end of his earthly life, this man had a song that he sang. A song that reminded him of the God he loved and served, the God who walked with him and spoke to him and befriended him.

[35 : 34] He didn't experience the throne room and exalted Christ like Isaiah did. He didn't witness Jesus being transfigured before his eyes.

No, his life was much more ordinary like ours. And yet, because he experienced the Lord, it was extraordinary. extraordinary.

So much so, it was worthy of this wonderful psalm, a song of praise. And while we may not expect to have the same experiences as Isaiah, Peter, James, and John, I believe Psalm 119 was given to us so that we might be envisioned for a psalmist's kind of communion with the Lord.

He's eager to bless his children with himself. He's eager to enthrall us with the truth of his perfect love, wisdom, and power.

So commune with him. Immerse yourself in prayer and in his revealed word. Listen as he reveals to us the wonders of his character and the steadfast love and wisdom he gives.

[36 : 55] Pay attention to that still small voice that's saying to you throughout your day, I am with you. I will never leave you or forsake you.

I am your God and I will carry you through every trial and tribulation. And I am growing you into the image of my son.

When we immerse ourselves in this communion, when we live our lives aware of the Lord's nearness and favor, the fruit is a life of meaning, significance, joy, and courage.

Glory for our heavenly father and a joyous song for us. Amen. Let's pray. Amen. gracious God, you have loved us and you have given yourself to us.

Give us grace now that we would see in your revealed word your ways, that we would hear in your revealed word your voice to us, reminding us that you have plucked us out of this world and brought us into the kingdom, that you are guiding us in the way that we should go.

[38 : 32] You're growing us, making us more mature, and that you are powerful to save. You are there to help in our times of trial.

Lord, give grace to us that we may be aware of your nearness, your favor in our lives, and may we give you glory forever and ever.

Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

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