

The Lord who shows mercy

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Preacher: Peter Montague

[0 : 00] Good morning. A very warm welcome to you. Welcome to Union Baptist Church. I'd like to welcome you especially if you're new to us or if you're visiting. You're very welcome and I hope you enjoy the time with us. I hope you're blessed by the time with us. It's great to have you here. My name's Andrew and I'll be leading the service later on. Pete will be sharing from Psalm 123 as we continue our series, Summer of Psalms, looking through various psalms this summer. But as we prepare to worship God this morning, let's just spend a moment in quiet and then I'll lead us in a prayer.

Father God, we thank you today for who you are. We thank you that you are the creator. We thank you that you are above the whole universe. We thank you that you are enthroned in the heavens. We look to you this morning and we are in awe of who you are. And we look to your son, Jesus Christ, who has made a way for us to not just stand in awe and observe your greatness from a distance, but to enter your presence, to be close to you, to be able to connect with you this morning, to call you our father, to have you as our father. We're so thankful for what you've done for us through Jesus. We pray that you would open our hearts to worship you now and that our praise this morning would be pleasing to you. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's stand and we're going to worship together.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[2 : 13] Amen. in Christ alone, my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my strength, my life. My song, this cornerstone, this solid ground, burn through the fiercest drought and storm.

What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease. My comforter, my all in all, here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless pain.

This gift of love and righteousness, spawned by the ones he came to save.

Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied. For every sin on him was laid, here in the death of Christ I live.

[3 : 50] There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness slay.

Then bursting forth and glorious day, up from the grave he rose again.

And as he's found in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me. For I am his and he is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ.

The death of God, the death of Christ, the death of Christ, the death of Christ. No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me.

From life's first cry to final death, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever love me from his hand.

[5 : 22] Till he returns, or calls me home, here in the power of Christ. I stand.

No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever love me from his hand.

Till he returns, or calls me home, here in the power of Christ. I stand.

Yes Lord, we do thank you, and we praise you. We are so full of thanks for the heights of love that you have demonstrated to us, and what you've done for us, and the depths of peace, and the ridding us of our guilt.

That could only be done through the death of your son. And we're so thankful for that. We thank you that as we approach your throne, we stand in the love of Christ, as your children have been adopted by you out of your great love.

[6 : 26] We thank you that Christ did that for us. Thank you that he took on flesh. And thank you that through his death and resurrection we live without guilt. We can stand in your presence.

We can stand in your throne room because of what Christ has done for us. And we can approach you boldly, knowing that we are loved by you. We continue to worship you, Lord. By grace alone somehow I stand Where even angels fear to tread Invited by redeeming love Before the throne of God above He pulls me close With nails-garred hands Into his everlasting arms

When condemnation Rifts my heart And Satan tempts me to despair I hear the voice that scatters in The great I am, the Lord is here Oh, praise the one who dies for me And shields my soul eternally Only I have brought your throne Only I have brought your throne Mayfeless now I'm running home By your blood I've done

Welcome as your own Welcome as your own Into the arms of majesty Behold the bright and risen sun Son More beauty than this world has I'm face to face with love himself His purpose, righteous righteousness A thousand years A thousand times I'm not enough to sing his praise Only I approach your throne Blameless now I'm running home

By your blood I've come Welcome, glad your throne Into the arms of majesty This is the hour of celebration Now we've been free from condemnation Oh, praise the one Praise the one Who made her hand to all my sins This is the hour of celebration This is the hour of celebration Now we've been free from condemnation Oh, praise the one Oh, praise the one Praise the one

[10:49] Who made an end to all my sin Who made an end to all my sin Who made an end to all my sin Amen Amen Do please sit down Now, later on When the children and young people Go out to their groups Their program The Eco Church program today They're thinking about Different jobs that people do And the special job That God has given all of us In creation But it's good for us to think about Different jobs that each other Each other in our church family do And with that in mind We're going to hear from Grace And Sheena's going to be asking Some questions to her About what she's doing This time tomorrow So welcome Grace and Sheena Good morning everybody

This is really exciting So yes, I'm going to be asking Grace About what she's going to be doing This time tomorrow But before we do that Grace, I'm going to ask you What your job is Thank you Well, some of you might know my job And some of you might not But I brought some things To help me show you And I wondered if I had a volunteer That might want to help Wear some of the things That I might wear at work Is there anybody that might help?

Come on JJ So sometimes when I go to work I wear this And sometimes when I go to work I have some special things to help me So I have a few things in this bag That I'd like you to help me Face it around So this is the first one Do you think you can put that on for me?

That's it? Wow Can you get it? Turn around and face everyone So sometimes I have to wear this And look like a bright banana And I often have to wear this So in case those aren't quite enough hints for you I do sometimes have to use these as well I'm not going to give these to JJ Don't worry But sometimes I also have to make sure That I have one of these And I have to show people this When I go and see them So JJ With all these clues What job do you think I have?

Police Correct Well done I am a police officer And I work for the Met in London So Grace Where will you be this time tomorrow? So tomorrow I will be based out of Wembley Police Station And I will be going into the communities Of Harrow, Brent and Barnet Which is part of the edge of London Great And what are you going to be doing there?

[13:48] Well So I wrote some notes Because I do quite a lot So I am part of a team That works on some serious assaults That happen And I have had some special training To talk to people After something like that happens And so what I do Is I go and I talk to them And I interview them And find out what happened Sometimes just like this And sometimes not And I try and help them Get all their evidence And then sometimes I have to go to court with them And help them when they go there And that's the time That I do have to put Some of this on So that everybody knows Who I am in the court Great And so who will you meet tomorrow When you go?

So I meet a range of different people From all sorts of backgrounds So I work with people From the youngest of ages All the way to the oldest of ages So sometimes I might go and meet families That have got children that are babies And sometimes I go and meet some people That are in their 80s and 90s And see how they're doing They all come from a range Of different countries and backgrounds So it's very interesting To meet lots of different people Great And so what are some of the joys And the challenges?

Well it's really rewarding To be able to help somebody When they share what's happened to them And if I've come to meet you You've had a pretty bad day And so for me to come And to help you feel a little bit better And to process what's happened It's really rewarding Sometimes cases are a

bit sad But it's good to help people move forwards And look at the good things that can come But sometimes it can be quite difficult To talk about what happened Sometimes it's for the people Talking about it it's hard And sometimes for me It can be quite hard to hear And so that can make it difficult The other challenge that we face On a daily basis Is there's supposed to be 16 people That can do what I do And we only have 7 people So I deal with quite a lot more people Than I should So I don't necessarily give everybody The time that I think they deserve So that can be challenging Knowing when to stop talking to somebody That's really tough So where have you seen God at work?

So I work with lots of agencies That support people That have been through some serious things And I see God largely at work through them And the family members that all gather around To support people when I come to see them So I can really see God empowering people To work in places And calling them there When they've got special talents To help people I've also seen it through what I do So where I'm not allowed to talk about my faith In my job I am allowed to wear my cross So I always wear my cross to work And even in the bright banana You can still see it And so often people will say to me Oh are you a Christian?

And then I can start a conversation with them And so I have on a few occasions Been able to pray with people Before they went into court And gave their evidence So we sat and prayed Which was lovely Brilliant So how can we pray for you then Grace?

[16:38] Well there are three things I can think of at the top of my head That would be great for prayer for There's always more So please come and talk to me afterwards If you want to know any more But firstly I think for staffing levels across policing So as I mentioned We're short staffed But I know a lot of the police forces In this country are short staffed Tens Valley here are And across the Met we are And so it makes it really difficult To do our jobs Because you can't do everything you want to do To help people Because you have to move on to the next thing So just for staffing levels across policing Secondly for my unit itself For God's strength and enthusiasm for us Because we are dealing with some quite serious things And it can be quite difficult So sometimes we get a bit upset ourselves Or we get a bit exhausted Because we work long shifts So our protection on our unit ourselves And finally just that I can continue to do the work That God has called me to do And have more opportunities To talk to my victims But also my colleagues about my faith

Okay Let's pray for grace for those things Father God we thank you For the way you've called grace to this role Which is a difficult role We pray particularly for the understaffing That there is both in her unit And many other units around the country We pray that you will provide for them And in that time We pray that you will keep them motivated Keep them strong We pray for the protection around them When things get really tough We pray that they'll have each other to rely on And others to talk to to offload We pray that you will be the strength That grace needs to do the job that she's doing We pray that you'll be very close to her Keep her focused on you Strengthening her every day To rely on you Because you know that you have placed her where she is Continue to give her your grace Lord In Jesus name Amen Thank you Grace Thanks Sheena Thank you Grace Well thank you so much

And thank you to JJ For the police uniform modelling there Brilliant job And yeah as Grace said If you'd like to find out more About what she's doing this time tomorrow Do please go and talk to her afterwards In coffee and that's a great time When we share tea and coffee And refreshments after the service To ask each other What will you be doing this time tomorrow And that's an opportunity for us to pray For each other at that time As well to encourage each other As we go out to our own front lines I'd just like to share with you a few things That are coming up in the next few weeks And sooner than that as well So this evening we have a communion service 6.30pm this evening We'll be sharing communion together Michael will be leading that service Malcolm will be preaching I do encourage you to come along here At 6.30pm It'd be great to see you To see you there On the first Monday of the month Which is tomorrow We normally have a missions prayer meeting To prayer for our missions partners Overseas around the world Tomorrow that's taking place here At the Hub At 7.30pm And we'll have special guests Mark and Andrea Hodgkins Who normally work in Chad But they're over visiting And it'd be a great opportunity To meet with them

And to pray with them So do join us tomorrow evening At 7.30pm for that This coming week Hopefully you've seen the notices We've got funerals for Two of our church members Margaret Cunliffe on Wednesday And Ron Driver on Friday Both of those are at 11.45pm At the crematorium Followed by 1.15pm Here at the sanctuary For a thanksgiving service I do hope you can join us For

those And looking a few weeks ahead In three weeks time On the 27th of August That will be Malcolm's last Sunday With us And we'll have a time After the service To thank Malcolm and Dawn And to celebrate with them To give thanks to God With them And that'll be followed By a picnic So do please save the date And put that in your diaries For the 27th of August In three weeks time Now the last few weeks We've been praying for Chris, our ministry trainee Who's currently in Tanzania With Emmanuel International And we've got a video message From him Updating us on what He's been up to So here's Chris So we can hear from him Hi everyone

I hope you're all doing well Back in Wickham I'm in Tanzania In Oringa At the Emmanuel International House That they have here And it's been so much fun Being here And I've seen God Doing some really amazing things So today we went to Abumu Where Emmanuel International Has done a water project To provide the village there And the school With a reliable source of water And they've also built And they've also built A latrine block At the school And a new school laboratory And it was Yeah, really encouraging Just to see how happy The staff there were At the school And how grateful they are For what Emmanuel International Are doing Another highlight For me Has been seeing how The different projects That EI are running Aren't just meeting People's physical needs

[21 : 45] But also helping them Encounter Jesus too So I know there have been Several of the projects Where because they You know They see that people pray Or they have You know Group Bible studies Muslims or people Who haven't thought Much about Jesus before Have wanted to Read the Bible And to find out More about what it means To know Jesus And to follow him So that's been Really amazing To see that too And I was Also really encouraged When I went along To church this Sunday Just to see how Joyfully people Worship here And That was A really amazing thing To take part in And something that I'll That I feel That I can learn from anyway When I come back to the UK So yeah It's been great here And thank you all For supporting me And praying for me And I'll see you all soon

Brilliant Well that's really Really encouraging isn't it And do please pray for Chris On the 10th That's later in the week He'll be travelling From Meringa Where he is now To north east Tanzania To Tanga region Where he'll be spending A couple of weeks Working with a new Emmanuel international Project And finding out about that And supporting the work there So we'll have a chance To pray for Chris Later in our service When Roger leads us In intercessions Right now After I've prayed The children Are going to go off To their programme And young people Are going to be helping them So we'll pray for them And their leaders And I'll invite the musicians To come and get ready Before I pray And then as we sing The next song The children And young people Can go out to their groups So let's pray for them Yeah Father God We thank you For that really encouraging news From Chris And we Yeah we pray That you'll continue To use him To encourage And inspire those That he's with And to inspire him As well We pray now For our children

Young people As they help And for the leaders As they go To their session And we pray That you'll bless them With a lot of fun A good time together And I pray That they'll discover more About how great you are This morning We pray that In Jesus name Amen So please stand And we're going to sing As the children And young people Go out to their session Let's continue To praise God Man of sorrows Man of sorrows Love of God By his own betraying

The sin of man And wrath of God And wrath of God Has been on Jesus' way Silent as he stood Accused Beaten, mocked and scorned Now into our dear arch Where your love poured out over me Now my soul cries out, Hallelujah

Praise and honour unto thee Saint of heaven, awesome Son To purchase and redeem And reconcile the very ones Who dealt it to the tree O that rugged cross, my salvation Where your love poured out over me Now my soul cries out, Hallelujah Praise and honour unto thee

[26 : 51] Now my debt is paid, it is paid in full By the precious blood that my Jesus filled Now the curse of sin has no hold on me In the deep, O that rugged cross, my salvation

Where your love poured out over me Now my soul cries out, Hallelujah Praise and honour unto thee See the stone is rolled away Behold the empty tomb Hallelujah, God be praised He's risen from the tree O that rugged cross, my salvation Where your love poured out over me Now my soul cries out, Hallelujah Praise and honour unto thee Now my soul cries out, Hallelujah

Praise and honour unto thee Praise and honour unto thee Praise and honour unto thee Praise and honour unto thee Amen Thank you Lord Do you please sit down And Roger's going to lead us in our intercessions We come to our heavenly Father to bring our praise and worship Let's pray together

We come as your people because of what the Lord has done For us on the cross
Lord Jesus, you came to reclaim us from our sin To stand condemned in our place We've just sung those wonderful words You came as the spotless Lamb of God To bring us full atonement You came to die and rise again And you will come again to take us home Hallelujah We come to bring our prayers for ourselves and others United in our trust in you We pray for your church worldwide And how you are blessing it Despite much opposition We pray for Chris Mangtalo in Tanzania As we've seen him speaking to us And heard him speaking to us this morning And we ask your blessing and protection on him As he witnesses what you are doing Through Emmanuel International And the churches in that country Surround him with your love and grace And grace and guide him as he speaks your word And encourages those whom he meets We pray particularly for his journey To northeastern Tanzania To the new project that is starting And also beyond that time For his time in Kenya At the end of his time in Africa Where he will be with a completely new set of people In a completely new setting with new challenges Surround him with your love and care we pray Father we thank you for the opportunity that we have tomorrow To meet with Mark and Andrea And we thank you for your protection over them And the work at Bardi Hospital in Chad We thank you that they are able to visit us tomorrow Share news of what you are doing And we want to pray that you would encourage them in their visit May they be encouraged by our prayers And our interest in their ministry Bless them we pray Father we thank you for the consistent proclamation of your word to us

[32 : 05] Here at Union We lift Malcolm to you in these last weeks of ministry here We give thanks for his time here Oh that he means to us As you have used him to build your church And lift your name on high Inspire and encourage him And we pray that you will bless him And dawn as they move forward Into this new phase of life We pray for Andrew As he prepares to lead us in the coming year Inspire and equip him for the task And we pray that these next weeks of holiday Will bring refreshment and healing We commit him and Miriam and the family to you We pray for other churches in our area And their encouragement In particular we uphold those who support them Through their preaching ministry We particularly pray for Mike Birmingham Pete Montague George Haynes and Aubrey Dunford

May you strengthen them in their preaching Inspire them Holy Spirit As they study and prepare your word And for each different church and situation That they go to And Father we thank you again For the opportunities that some of our young people Have had to learn more about you And build their faith at the wet camp And the wet camp coming this week That some are going to May they grow into young men and young women of God Trusting and serving you for your glory Lord God you have led us over these past years As we have committed to the Living Stones project In these final weeks of preparation Before the works begin We ask that you will remove any final obstacles that remain And lead us into this coming year As we worship you and support each other In new and different ways We pray this

For your glory And not ours Lord we have had a season of sadness But as a number of our fellowship As a number of our fellowship have passed to glory And to be with you We continue to pray for all the families who have been bereaved That you will surround them with your love Your grace, your mercy and your compassion This week we especially remember before you The families of Margaret Cunliffe And Ron Driver As their funerals take place We give thanks for lives of faith and service And for the reminder of the glorious promise That you have prepared a place for us in heaven Help us to live our lives in the light of that promise And now let us take some moments of quiet To bring those that we know who are ill or troubled

And need your special healing touch and compassion And we commit them now to you Lord Jesus Gracious Father Hear our prayers And may we lift up our eyes And give you all the glory And all the praise In the name of Jesus Amen Thank you so much Roger Before O'Brien brings the Bible reading to us Our musicians are going to lead us As we sing before the throne of God above Let's stand and worship God together Let's stand and worship God together Let's stand and worship God together Before the throne of God above

I have a strong, a perfect place A great time of Jesus whose name is love A great time Christmas, name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

[36 : 34] My name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his front, I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart.

No tongue can bid me thence depart. And Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within.

Upward I look and see him then, who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free.

For God the just is satisfied, to look on him and pardon me. To look on him and pardon me.

He called him never-written man, like the rich, spotless righteousness.

[37 : 59] The greater King of who I am, the King of glory and of grace. One thing is that I cannot die.

My soul is purchased with his blood. My life is here with Christ on high. With Christ my Saviour and my God.

With Christ my Saviour and my God. With Christ my Saviour and my God.

Good morning. Good morning. And how are you today? Good. Good, good, good. Our scripture reading this morning is taken from Psalm 123.

And we'll read from verse 1 to the end. To you I lift up mine eyes. O you who are enthroned in the heavens.

[39 : 19] Behold as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master. As the eyes of maidservant to the hand of her mistress.

So our eyes look to the Lord our God. Till he has mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, O Lord. Have mercy upon us. For we have had more than enough of contempt.

Our soul has had enough. Has had more than enough. Of the scorn of those who are at ease of the contempt of the proud. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen. Thank you O'Brien. I'd like to welcome up Pete. And I'll just pray for him before he shares with us. Thanks Pete. Great, let's pray.

Father God, we thank you so much for the gift of your word. And we thank you for Peter. And thank you for the gifts you've given him. To be able to teach and preach and share your word.

[40 : 26] And I pray that you would speak through him now. And I pray that you would open our hearts to hear from you. And that your Holy Spirit will be working among all of us. As we hear what you have to say to us through Pete now.

We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Bless you. Thanks. What wonderful words in song we've been declaring together this morning.

We have been lifting our eyes to the one enthroned in heaven. As we were praying in the room out the back there this morning. We could hear the music.

Beautiful music. And beautiful voices just lifting up. And it was a privilege to hear that. So thank you musicians and singers for just leading us into the presence of God this morning.

It's been truly, truly wonderful. A businessman decided it was time to shed some excess pounds. He took his new diet seriously.

[41 : 26] Even changing his driving route to avoid his favourite bakery. One morning, however, he showed up at work with a gigantic coffee cake.

Everyone in the office scolded him. But his smile remained nonetheless. This is a special coffee cake, he explained. I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning.

And there in the window was a host of goodies. I felt it was no accident. So I prayed, Lord, if you want me to have one of those delicious coffee cakes, let there be a parking spot open right in front. And sure enough, the eighth time round the block, there it was. A man who had perhaps lost his focus and was distracted from what he was trying to do.

Psalm 123 is written by someone who is deliberately trying to focus on the Lord, to put him first in his life.

[42 : 40] The book of Psalms can be split into five individual books. And although not organised by topic, it is thought that each book may have a dominant theme relating to the books in the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses.

The words we are looking at this morning are in the fifth book, running from Psalm 107 through to 150.

Many of them are anthems of worship and thanks to God for his word. Set to music, these psalms are a hymn book of praise.

Psalm 123 is part of a collection called the Songs of Ascent. They are anthems for going up to a high place. The temple, as the people of Israel, made annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

Every tribe took part. The nation was united in praise and celebration. What a tremendous place to be, together, caught up in the presence of God.

[43 : 49] The three-week Keswick Convention has just finished taking place in the Lake District. We've been there in previous years.

It's been lovely to be in the middle of incredible scenery with God's people, honouring his name and knowing that unity in worship together. And many of you will have been to other events, spring harvest and new wine, for example.

And it's great, isn't it, to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ, being taught by the Spirit. And it's what we are doing together this morning, united in praise and worship, giving God the glory, experiencing his presence amongst us.

What an awesome privilege that together, through Jesus, we can draw near to God.

This morning, we have entered a high place. Like those going to the temple, we have ascended steps to worship the Lord.

[45 : 03] Those in the gallery have ascended even more. Let us rejoice as we draw near to God. And this psalm speaks into the situations of those who are struggling, because although they were being faithful, they have received persecution from others.

And in a lament, the psalmist is calling on God for help, but the writer anticipates God's response in the way that servants wait for their master to act.

So let's look a little bit more closely at these verses. Verse 1, To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens. These words have a historical context.

The one whose throne is in heaven is a phrase used several times in the book of Ezra and Nehemiah. In the first two chapters of Nehemiah, the phrase, the providing, protecting hand of God, is mentioned three times.

In the story about the rebuilding of the temple in chapters 2 and 4, Sanballat and others greet the workers with ridicule and contempt. It is thought by some that Psalm 123 relates directly to this story of Nehemiah in the post-exilic period.

[46 : 33] And as the psalmist ascends the great staircase to the outer gate of the temple, he looks upwards, beyond the gate, to a heavenly throne, to the Lord.

He is deliberately focusing on God and drawn into his presence. Quite a few years ago, I was walking across the yard at work.

I had a document in my hands that I was reading and I wasn't really paying attention to my surroundings. Suddenly, I found myself on the ground with a very painful head.

Completely absorbed in something else, I had failed to see a park forklift truck with raised arms and walked straight into it.

My glasses were damaged and my pride was severely dented. But I managed to survive. I walked into trouble because I did not focus properly on what I was doing.

[47 : 40] Being distracted, I failed to look where I was going. Are you struggling in life? Trying to focus on where you are going but being distracted by activities that have drawn you away from God?

The Lord says to you this morning, lift your eyes to him. Trust in him. But the question comes, how can we consciously lift our eyes to the Lord?

I think part of the answer is contained in the text of Psalm 23. Malcolm asked last week what our favourite psalm was and a number of you replied, my favourite psalm is this psalm.

It just speaks words into everyday life. Here, Asaph, the leader of David's choir, responsible for leading worship in the temple, a sort of early day Matt Redmond perhaps, is struggling.

He is admitting that is he on the point of packing up his faith, he can't cope anymore. Why? The issue is that he is leading a godly life but getting crosser by the minute.

[48 : 58] It's because those who had been doing, those who had been deliberately turning their backs on God seem to be doing alright in their life. Their health is good, they are carefree and wealthy, they don't seem to have any of the other problems that believers have.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? And verses 16 to 17 in Psalms 73 say the following, you might want to turn to it in your pew Bible.

Verses 16 to 17, Psalms 73. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God.

Then I understood their final destiny. The problem wasn't sorted until he made a conscious effort to go into the temple and worship.

Focusing on God put everything else into perspective. His issues melted away. He was learning to lift his eyes to the heavenly throne.

[50 : 10] Contrast his words of doom and gloom with the anthem of praise declared in verses 21 through to 26. When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant before you.

I was a brute beast before you. Yet, I am always with you. You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel and afterwards you will take me into glory.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire beside you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

What a turnaround. It's because he focused his eyes upon the one who is enthroned in the heavens. So what we are experiencing together this morning, none of us knows how completely how this week will pan out.

There are difficult problems that many of us will have to face. But on the first day of the week, we have come together to declare God is holy, God is awesome, we are at his mercy and we are lifting our eyes to the one whose throne is in heaven.

[51 : 34] Asaph learned to let go of what he was carrying and trusted God for the outcome. Here in my hands a bottle of water.

It's travelled the last couple of years, these bottles travelled many miles round the country. If it's a hot sunny day, we use two bottles but I haven't had to use two bottles in quite a while.

Lovely, refreshing water. It's not that heavy, I guess, just under a kilo, something like that. But the weight is irrelevant.

The important thing is how long I hold it for. If I hold it for a couple of minutes, it's fairly light, not a problem. If I stand here holding it for an hour, and you're hoping that I won't be, my arm will perhaps begin to ache a little while.

It's shaking already actually, my arm. If I stay here and hold it all day, my arm will cramp up and feel numb and probably eventually get pins and needles and I won't be able to do anything.

[52 : 50] It'll be paralysed. The weight of this bottle doesn't change, but the longer I hold it, it feels heavier to me.

I can't lift my arm or do anything else. Our stresses and our strains in life are like this. If you think about them for a little while, nothing happens.

But the longer we hold on, we become numb, unable to do anything until we drop them and put them down. Are you holding on to something today that is weighing you down?

Let go. Hold on to Jesus. And the wonderful thing is that when you let go of what you are holding on to, you can lift your arms and your eyes and worship and give God the glory.

There are other ways in which we can look to the one whose throne is in heaven. Words of scripture, Psalm 119 verse 105 declares, thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

[54 : 10] God's word helps us lift our eyes to his throne. Let it speak to you of how much you are loved and cared for, that you are a precious child of God, that nothing can separate you from his love, that in Jesus you have a new life.

And when we read the promises of God, we are drawn into his presence. Not every part is easy and straightforward. I'm reading Ezekiel at the moment and to be honest, it's a real, real struggle.

I really don't fancy reading it at times. But even in the difficult parts, God speaks. And as I read Ezekiel, I'm holding for the promises of the Holy Spirit to come in the rest of the book.

Fellowship with other believers is so important, lifting your eyes to the Lord together, perhaps through sharing in a life group. Proverbs 27, 17 says, as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Earlier this year when we were facing one or two difficult things, what helped us through was the blessing of meeting with friends for coffee, to know the Lord's presence together as we talked about life.

[55 : 32] And when you meet with another believer and talk about stuff, God is there. His spirit is in you and with you. And together, as you share, you are lifting your eyes to the one whose throne is in heaven.

Sharing our faith, when we step out of our comfort zones and learn to depend upon God, we are lifting our eyes to the heavenly throne. So verse 2, Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid servant look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God till he has mercy upon us.

Servants, and in particular servant girls, had a very lowly position in this society. They had no power, no capacity to defend or protect themselves, and were literally at the mercy of their masters. So they looked to the guiding hand of their master for all that they needed. willing to obey, they were also ready to trust a hand that helps and provides.

See, under Mosaic law, the responsibility of the heads of households in this society was to treat their work as well. We think of Boaz in the story of Ruth, for example.

[56 : 56] And the comparison is made to show that the psalmist and his listeners had complete and utter dependence upon God. As a servant waits for a signal from the hand of the master, those enduring hardship were looking to the hand of Yahweh and pleading for help amid great adversity.

This is the heart of the analogy, complete and utter dependence upon God. You see, focusing upon God puts everything into perspective.

As we worship the creator of the universe, as we catch a little glimpse of who he is. As we see what he has provided for us in Jesus, we know he can be trusted and is utterly dependable.

Time after time, he shows us his mercy. The Hebrew for lifting eyes means to look longingly or with desire.

We regularly look after our 18-month-old granddaughter. She's a bundle of fun and energy and we love her to bits. But if she's feeling a little out of sorts, her safe place is in the arms of our son and daughter-in-law.

[58 : 18] As she is picked up, she throws her arms around them in an embrace of complete dependence and utter trust.

she looks longingly at them. Do we longingly look into our heavenly father's eyes and trust him for all that we need?

We can be secure in his presence in the midst of all our needs. And verses three to four show us what the needs of the psalmist were.

Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease of the contempt of the proud.

The writer was crying out in distress for God's mercy because of those who were being arrogant and displaying scorn towards himself and those he represented.

[59 : 20] Their spite had become so much that a cry goes out to their Lord in heaven. given the possible historical context, it may be that all the bitterness the writer has suffered at the hands of the Babylonians and the ongoing criticism of the temple rebuild are still carrying an emotional toll.

And these words could signify Israel ridiculed and humiliated by conquerors but appealing over their heads to the one supreme in heaven for mercy, the one in whom they have confidence.

And like the psalmist, there are many times in our lives when we cry out, Lord, why is this happening to me? Please take it away. I can't cope with it anymore.

And I think what these words teach us is do not be afraid to cry out to God in lament. He is far bigger, more powerful than we could ever know or understand, and he hears us.

A lament in scripture describes an unbearable situation in which the author finds himself, but also declares complete dependence upon the Lord, and immense thanks is offered for the grace of God.

[60 : 47] It's been said that faith is the bird that sings, when dawn is dark. Did not Jesus himself cry out to God in his hour of need?

In Psalm 22, David cries out to God for help because his enemies are mocking him. Jesus echoes these words on the cross.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus was placing himself at the mercy of his father to save him and to fulfill his purposes.

Jesus suffered because he was carrying the weight of our sin, the things that separate us from God on the cross, dying in our place.

But because he lived a perfect life, death could not hold him and he rose gloriously to new life. And because of Jesus, we are able this morning to stand boldly in the presence of the one whose throne is in heaven because we are covered with his righteousness.

[62 : 02] Jesus has shown us God's mercy. love the words in the Graham Kendrick song, for the joys and for the sorrows, the best and worst of times, for this moment, for tomorrow, for all that lies behind, fears that crowd around me, for the failure of my plans, for the dreams of all, I hope to be the truth of what I am.

For this, I have Jesus. Jesus. For this, I have Jesus. For this, I have Jesus. In whatever you are facing today, Jesus is standing with you.

There was a professor of theology who was nearing the end of a very illustrious and distinguished career. He was asked if in all his years of study, learning, and understanding, he could describe the one outstanding truth he had discovered.

He thought for a moment and said, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Know today that you are loved by the one whose throne is in heaven. May you have the faith to lift your eyes and say, yes, Lord Jesus, I trust in you.

[63 : 36] And as you raise your eyes, you will know God's mercy in your time of need. Let's pray.

And let's just be still for a moment in the presence of the one whose throne is in heaven, and reflect maybe on what the Lord has been saying.

Is there something that we are holding onto that he is calling us to put down and lift our arms in worship?

Lord, help us to let go of the things that distract us and give us the strength to lift our eyes and our hands in worship today.

May a song of joy be in our hearts even if the sky is dark and life is hard and hope thin on the ground. And in that song, that sacrifice, may hearts be warmed, eyes lifted high, and faith restored in one who knows and cares and loves enough to die and rise again for us.

[64 : 57] We ask this in the precious name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen. Our final song together enables us to give thanks to the Lord Jesus.

How wonderful, how marvellous is my Saviour's love to me. Let's declare this together as a prayer from our hearts to the one enthroned in the heavens.

Amen. I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder how he could love me a sinner from death not clean.

me how marvelous, how wonderful and my song shall ever be.

How marvelous, how wonderful is my Saviour's love for me.

[66 : 41] for me it was in the garden he prayed not my will but thine he had no tears for his own grief and spread drops of blood for mine.

How marvelous, how wonderful and my soul shall ever be.

How marvelous, marvelous, how wonderful is my Saviour's love for me.

He took my sins and my sorrows, shall ever be.

He made his very home. He bore the burden of Calvary and suffered and died alone.

[68 : 22] How marvelous, how wonderful is my Saviour's love for thee.

How marvelous, how wonderful is my Saviour's love for thee. How wonderful is my Saviour's love for thee.

How wonderful, how wonderful, and my soul shall ever be. love more than you will be.

How wonderful, and my love will be. How will be. The love will be. If you have ever lived, the man served in glory, A man so take glory, his grace I at last shall see.

To give a joy to the ages, to save all his love for me.

[69 : 39] How marvelous, how wonderful, and my soul shall ever be.

How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me.

How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me.

How marvelous we do. Thank you, Lord, for your amazing love revealed to us in Jesus.

Amen. Do please sit down. Thank you so much for joining with us this morning. I'd love to encourage you to join us after the service in the hall behind me for refreshments, tea, coffee.

[70 : 54] There's ice lollies as well. If it's not too cold for ice lollies, there will be ice lollies there. So do enjoy them. It's a great opportunity to get to know each other. And we'd love to pray for you.

I'd love to pray with you if you've got something to thank God for. Or something difficult that you'd just like to share with someone else and give that to God with someone else. Myself or anyone with a praying hands badge would love to spend time with you and pray with you after the service.

I do encourage you, if you haven't picked up one of these, Life Group brochures. We've been talking about Life Groups. We'll be talking about this over the next few weeks. The launch of Life Groups is going to be in September. But we encourage you to look at the brochure, pray about it, think about which group you could sign up for.

And there'll be an opportunity to sign up in September. A final prayer. Let's pray. May we look to you, Lord, you who are enthroned in the heavens.

As we spend time encouraging one another now, and as we go from here and face the joys and challenges of the week ahead, may we know your goodness, your love, your mercy, your sovereignty and your power in our lives, revealed to us in Jesus.

[72 : 07] And may it show clearly to those around us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.