

SERVICE TRANSCRIPT
SUNDAY AUGUST 29th 2021

Leader: Delyth Mayhew

Speaker: Mark Reid

Welcome, Notices & Birthdays

Call to worship from Hebrews 10

Here are some words from Hebrews chapter 10

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

SONG 1407 King of the Ages

Prayer

SONG 1404 King of Kings

SONG 379 Majesty

Prayer

2 weeks ago I was worshipping at the church I used to attend in Stroud, in Gloucestershire – and I bring you warm greetings from the fellowship there..

That morning, the minister preached on the passage I read at the start of the service -from Hebrews 10.

It has stayed with me since, and that last sentence

. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

And as you read further on, further on it says

.....do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

.....You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

As I thought about this passage, this question came to mind!

Caterpillar and Pillar

Do you know the difference between a caterpillar and a pillar?

Of course you do – a caterpillar is an insect and a pillar is – a pillar!

But let's think about it –

A caterpillar starts off as a crawling , many legged creature, which changes into a pupa and then emerged as a butterfly or moth – flies away and dies!

A pillar is built to stand firm and never change – these here in the church have been here for over 100 years, supporting the structure above.

Those in the picture are 1000's of years old, but still standing thought the rest of the structure has gone.

God doesn't want us to be caterpillars – changing with the seasons and then flying away!

He wants us to be pillars – standing firm in our faith and supporting others when they need our help.

He wants us to be those who choose His way, who

***hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,
staying confident in Him and
persevering***

knowing that He is faithful and we will receive what He has promised.

He wants us to stand firm – to stand on the rock which is Christ.

He is our rock – the rock on which we build our faith and the church.

We shall stand on that rock!

SONG 589 we shall stand (Book 1)

.....
Letter from Leprosy Mission:

The work of The Leprosy Mission has always been fuelled by prayer. Today, the countries you enable us to serve are facing huge challenges because of the pandemic and political unrest. Now more than ever, together we turn to our Father God in prayer. We place our trust in Him for protection, healing, and restoration of our broken world.

For those who have lost loved ones, we pray for God's comfort to wrap you up in His loving arms. For anyone who is fearful we pray that God's perfect love will cast out fear. For those who have health issues or concerns, we pray that in the Name of Jesus you know healing and restoration. For anyone experiencing financial challenges, we pray that God will provide for all your needs.

As the body of Christ let's continue to pray for each other and believe that our God is able to do more than we can ever ask or imagine.

As they pray for us, we pray for them, and all who work for the good of the world in God's name.

So we pray – and end of each section of prayer, I will say (as Mark did last week)

Lord in your mercy – you reply with – Hear our prayer.

Father, we pray for your people throughout the world who, day by day, carry out the work you have given them to do, sometimes in the face of great danger.

Be their strength, their health, their comfort and their hope. May they be able to continue to work for you to help to bring your word and your hope to all who need it.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

NEXT

We pray for the country of Afghanistan.

With the BMS, we give thanks that all their workers have been able to leave the country safely. And we pray that they will be able to continue their vital work remotely.

We thank you, Lord for BMS' commitment to the nation of Afghanistan, and we pray that the discussions that are taking place here at home may show how best to respond to an ever-changing situation

With the ending of the airlift we pray for foreigners and Afghans left behind that may be in danger, that they will be enabled to leave the country

And we pray for strength for the people who remain in Afghanistan now feeling so threatened and fearful for their futures, for Christians in that country who are always under threat of persecution, and for protection for those who have felt forced to leave the country or to move their families to a safer region

We Pray that those now rule in Afghanistan may keep to the commitments they made to make their regime less harsh than last time

May lasting peace and stability to be found in the nation of Afghanistan and an end to violence

.

And – we pray for wisdom for world leaders and governments as they seek to find a way out of this chaos.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

NEXT

Father – the threat of Covid throughout the world has not gone away, and every day the news changes.

We pray for those in our country who have to make decisions daily about how we respond to it. and our country's response to it. Give them wisdom and clear minds, and a desire to work together for the good of the people.

We pray for long lasting solutions, and we thank you for all those scientists and NHS workers who continue to work tirelessly towards that end.

And we pray for an end to fear, and a restoration of normality that feels safe to all.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

LASTLY

for our fellowship here: (leave quiet moments to name people in the silence)

For those who are unwell, in pain, awaiting test results

For those with worries about work, family, home, future

For wisdom for the leadership of this place as we try to steer a path into the future – with Covid concerns, the building and future plans.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

In the name of Jesus we pray

AMEN

Reading Joshua chapter 24 verses 1 - 24

Wise Choices

We live in a society where we are spoilt for choice. Whatever aspect of life we want to think about, we always want have a choice. CAKE SHOP So, whatever kind of shop we would like to go to, there is a vast choice. I often avoid really large stores because it takes so long to find anything!

MENU

It's the same in most restaurants. Look at the menu and you see a huge variety of meals. After you finally get around to choosing something, the waiter or waitress then says "and do you want that with chips, mashed potatoes, boiled potatoes rice, pasta, sweet potatoes or an old sock?" You know you don't want the sock but then there's the look at their consternation when you say you'd like a salad instead! And when the food arrives you find that you would have really preferred something else!

CHILDREN'S MENUS are simpler, because you only get 5 or 6 unappetising options. Whatever!

PERSON LOOKING AT CHOICES

Most of the choices we make day by day are relatively trivial but we all know that there are bigger choices in life – our career, where we live, buying a house or car, who we marry, how many children. Wrong choices can have huge consequences for our lives.

TITLE

Of course, I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't say that the most important choice in life is where we spend eternity. God offers a wonderful gift in Christ of forgiveness, of being part of His family, His kingdom, of having us walk with Him through life and having an eternal hope. Whether we follow Jesus or not is entirely up to us. Unlike most of life, with God, we are not spoilt for choice. It's a simple case of choosing Jesus alone - Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life, no-one comes to the Father except through Me." Have you made a decision to follow Jesus yet?

Of course, following Jesus still means we have to live the rest of our lives here on Earth as God's people, AS PART OF God's kingdom. How should we then live? That was the issue for the people of Israel as they completed their occupation of the Promised Land. They were now settled; what was going to happen next?

Here is what Joshua had to say in the verses we read

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the River Euphrates and in Egypt, and serve the Lord...

... But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'

[How do we walk in God's kingdom?]

This was the challenge for those now settling in the promised land, and I believe is much the same challenge for those of us who now live here on Earth as representatives of God's kingdom; part of His rule and reign. And that challenge is even more so in this post-pandemic period as we repair and rebuild after the storm of Covid-19.

Joshua gave the people a three-fold challenge in Chapter 24 which I believe is ours too. So how do we live as citizens of our Promised Land, the Kingdom of God, as we live on this Earth. Here's the list. Let's have a look at them.

FEAR THE LORD

Many Christians find the whole idea of the fear of God difficult. Surely God loves us doesn't He? He's our loving Father why should we fear him? It says in 1 John 4:18 that *there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.* In Christ we are objects of love and we have no fear because Jesus took the punishment for our sin. Why should we be afraid of Him if in Christ perfect love has cast our fear?

But Paul looks at it another way in Romans 3:18. Of those who don't know Christ he says *There is no fear of God before their eyes.* Those that fear God least are those that do not know Him and are oblivious to the wrath that God has laid up for the human race in times to come.

We come to faith in Christ when we realise who God is. He is a God who is righteous and just and hates sin. Be afraid, very afraid of the wrath of God; and that if nothing else, should drive anyone to fear of what God can and does to those who live in rebellion to Him. But that fear is positive because it points to the salvation, forgiveness of sin and the new life that God gives to all those who will trust and follow Jesus, which of course leads to the perfect love which casts out fear.

In the Joshua 24 the word used for fear is *yaw-ray'* which means to fear; morally to revere; to frighten, to be afraid or make afraid, to dread, to be in fear of. To hold in reverence. Some commentators see fear in terms of reverence towards God but actually, it really means fear, terror. As God's people, to understand God means to understand terror. Our faith deepens when we understand the righteousness of God and the terror of His wrath – because through that we understand the enormity of His love, the extravagance of His grace and the completeness of forgiveness as in Jesus He took the punishment for our sins, that we may live that His perfect love will then cast out that fear.

One way I thought we could think of the fear of God is in terms of electricity. **LIGHT BULB.** Electricity is at the heart of our modern society. It is everywhere and powers just about everything. How did we ever manage without it? **WARNING** But all of us know that we must deal with mains electricity with respect. It is usually very safe but can be extremely dangerous if we do not use it correctly. Every year in the UK **about 70 people die** and 1.2 million are injured in electrical accidents at home. One advantage of knowing what electric shock can do to us is that fear of it means that we know how to use it safely and keep us alive. The same is true of the fear of God.

Knowing that our sin has consequences as far as God is concerned should drive us to appreciate that in Christ, instead of wrath, God brings us blessings and those should cause worship to rise out from us and bring forth a desire to walk with Him day by day in the power of the Spirit.

One of the problems of not balancing our love of God with our fear of Him is that we see God as a cosmic chum and not as a Father who is angry when we don't hear His voice when our lives and words don't honour Him, when we don't show love in putting the needs of others before our own, when we ignore the prompting of the Spirit. And we just think He's going to ignore it and just give us a meek smile and continue to indulge our prayer life.

As His people, what does He do now that we should most fear? In my experience He lets us learn as a good parent does by having to live with the consequence of our wrongdoing, our sin. Are you suffering this morning, and you know it is because you've treated God lightly. Maybe things are bad, your prayer life has dried up, you are struggling with life with your circumstances and you don't know what on earth is going on with God? It's time to recognise that because God wants us to fear Him, recognise our failure and walk with Him afresh – *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

In the Old Testament some of the greatest blessing came out of some of the most terrifying but life-changing episodes between God and individual people:

- When Moses caught just a glimpse of the LORD's glory, Moses' face glowed for weeks afterwards.
- When Jacob wrestled with the LORD, Jacob wound up with a name change and limp for the rest of his life.
- When Isaiah saw the LORD in the temple, Isaiah said he was undone, wound up with burnt lips, and said "Yes" to the first "Mission: Impossible."
- When Paul encountered the LORD on the way to Damascus, Paul fell off his horse, lost his sight, but found his life's mission.

SERVE HIM FAITHFULLY or with all sincerity and truth

The second point comes from the first. As we have come to faith in Christ and entered the promised land as it were, knowing how much blessing, how do we respond to God? We serve Him. Dave Guzik puts serving God in the light of His blessings like this: *...for us, this is the difficult part - staying faithful to God after we have received much blessing from Him; the ease that can come with blessing can be a subtle enemy of serving God **in sincerity and truth**. Without hypocrisy, or the show of piety, in simplicity and truth of heart.*

After the pandemic, the challenge for us both personally and as a church is how God now wants us to serve Him? How? We need to seek Him, personally and corporately. What does He want us to do? Maybe it's the same as before. Maybe it's something to do and now more appropriate to our circumstances. The only thing I can tell you is that in God's kingdom, retirement doesn't exist. Provided you are still alive and conscious, you can serve Him.

GET RID OF OTHER GODS

Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the River Euphrates and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

One of the big problems human beings have is that we believe that we can compartmentalise our lives into God's bit and our bit. The truth is that every part of our lives needs to be placed under God's authority, prayed about, reflected upon. That which does not belong with God should be got rid of.

For Israel they had the challenges of removing the foreign Gods of Mesopotamia, of Egypt and the Amorites. The problem I've said on so many occasions was that other deities were worshipped alongside Yahweh because people wanted to hedge their bets just in case. It was an abomination to God to share a person's life with a carving or a lump of rock.

WHAT GODS DO WE SERVE?

Before you think that you are not an idolater think of all the things that are in your life that may be more important than God. In our society, wealth is a powerful foreign god. I still remain horrified by much American fundamentalism that sees prosperity as a mark of being blessed by God, even if "blessed people" like Donald Trump show themselves to be of low moral integrity and seem to have no fear of God. There's plenty of other things that can become gods in our lives which we place above God, GODS LIST. Now some of these things are laudable in themselves and others are just obviously wrong. But any of them can take over the centre of our lives from God WHEN DO LEGITIMATE THINGS BECOME GODS/IDOLS? If you see little of the presence or blessing of God in your life, try to reflect before God if any foreign gods like these are dominating over the presence of the Spirit of God. If they are then throw them away!

Joshua said "as for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord." What about your house and mine? What about this church. We shall serve the Lord! Let's pray.

CONFESSION

Father, this was a challenging passage.

As we reflect on it, please forgive us for all those times when we have taken Your love and forgiveness lightly, and ignored the fact completely that You are God of righteousness. We lift up those areas in our lives today, seek Your forgiveness and ask that we will walk afresh in Your presence.

Father show us those areas where other gods have replaced you whether that is the god of materialism, of a compulsion or addiction, or placing another person over You or placing ourselves and our needs before You.

Father open our hearts to Your will and Your way, that we may follow the commitment we made to You when we trusted Christ, to forsake all other things and follow Him May we be a people who serve You with true words and a true heart.

We ask this in Jesus' name

Amen

Closing song: Beautiful Lord, wonderful Saviour (The Potter's Hand)

SONG 1184 The potter's hand (x2)

Benediction

We close with these traditional words of sending:

*Go forth into the world in peace;
Be of good courage;
Hold fast that which is good;
Render to no one evil for evil;
Strengthen the faint hearted;
Support the weak;
Help the afflicted;
Honour all people;
Love and serve the Lord
Rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*And may the blessing of God almighty,
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Be amongst us, and remain with us always.
AMEN*

For Reflection and Discussion

Read Joshua 24 again.

1. Knowing that God gives us a simple choice about trusting Christ or not, why do we often find that we have to make such a bewildering number of moral choices in life? How do we navigate our way through them as God's people?
2. Why was it so important, do you think, that Joshua challenged the people as to whom they should serve as the conquest of Canaan ended and the people settled?
3. Why is it important to fear God particularly in developing a healthy spiritual life?
4. We are all familiar with the idea that we must serve the Lord, but why is sincerity and truth so important in our service?
5. Take time to reflect on those things in our lives and in our society right now that easily become idols in our lives. How do we rid ourselves of them and how can we support one another in doing this?