

14TH JUNE 2020

FERINTOSH PARISH CHURCH

WORSHIP AT HOME



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Robert Murray McCheyne said, "Set *NOT* your hearts on the flowers of this world. They shall fade and die. Prize the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley. He changes not! Live nearer to Christ than to any person on this earth; so that when they are taken, you may have Him to love and lean upon."

PSALM 8: 1 - 4

How excellent in all the earth,
Lord, our Lord, is thy name!
Who hast thy glory far advanced
above the starry frame.

From infants' and from sucklings' mouth
thou didest strength ordain,
For thy foes' cause, that so thou might'st
th' avenging foe restrain.

When I look up unto the heav'ns,
which thine own fingers framed,
Unto the moon, and to the stars,
which were by thee ordained;

Then say I, What is man, that he
remembered is by thee?
Or what the son of man, that thou
so kind to him should'st be?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, our faith is in thee, our expectation is from thee, our love goes out toward thee, we believe thee, accept thy word, acquiesce in thy will, rely on thy promises, trust thy providence. We bless thee that the court of conscience proves us to be thine. We do not need signs and wonders to believe, for thy Word is sure truth. We have cast our anchor in the port of peace, knowing that present and future are in nail-pierced hands. Thou art so good, wise, just holy, that no mistake is possible to thee. Thou art fountain and source of all law; what thou commandest is ours to obey. We yield to thy sovereignty all that we have; do thou with us as thou wilt. Thou hast given us silence in our hearts in place of murmurings and complaints. Keep our wishes from growing into willings, our willings from becoming fault-finding with thy providences, and have mercy on us, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

(Prayer from 'A collection of puritan prayers')

SCRIPTURE READING EPHESIANS 2: 1 - 7 (NKJV)

1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,

3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

SERMON

"So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:7).

One of the most challenging features of modern life is the sense of insignificance so many people feel. What does it matter, they think, at least in the grand scheme of things, how they live or what they contribute in life?

In part, this is fuelled by our society's cult of celebrity. We think fame is what determines how significant a person is. Music-artist Andy Warhol predicted that in the future "everyone would be famous for fifteen minutes." But most of us will never be famous for even five seconds, so we don't feel very important.

This is all magnified by today's secular ideology, and especially by the theory of evolution, the whole point of which is that there is no God who either created or governs this world. As a result, there is no meaning to life. Harvard Professor Stephen Gould sums up the implication of evolutionary atheism, writing, "We are here by accident... we have no intrinsic meaning." If that is true, then my job is just to make it through life, to have as many good times and as few bad times as possible, and to succeed in my selfish ambitions.

How does Christianity differ from this? Christianity says that there is a God and it is to Him that we live. Man, like all creation, was made by God and for God. As the first question of the Shorter Catechism tells us, we do have a purpose. It says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Sinclair Ferguson says, "The average man... has accepted the idea that life is without final purpose, and so he naturally devotes himself to whatever interests him at the moment. By contrast the Christian... walks on the path which God has laid; he enjoys the purpose for his life which God has ordained; he looks forward to the destiny which God has planned."

In Ephesians 2:7, Paul deals with this matter of meaning and purpose. He has been teaching about the glorious blessings that come to those who belong to Jesus Christ. He said that having been spiritually dead we have been made alive. Having been slaves to sin we have been raised up into the liberty of a heavenly citizenship. Having been condemned in our guilt, we are seated with God in loving fellowship. For many of us, this all seems too much to comprehend. Therefore, Paul tells us the reason for such an abundance of blessing for those who were God's enemies before he saved them. God did this, he says, "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

This tells us that the reason for our salvation is the glory of God. People hear the gospel and find it hard to believe that God would pardon and renew sinners by the sacrificial death of His Son. Why would God be willing to do this, they ask? The ultimate answer is that our salvation will serve to glorify God forever. Here is a great ground of assurance and hope to Christians who believe God's Word but feel so unworthy of salvation: it is precisely by saving people like us that God glorifies Himself; it is precisely by loving His enemies and transforming us into loving children by His grace that God is glorified in our salvation.

In this sense, it is the greatest sinners who provide God the greatest glory in salvation, so that Paul could boast, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). That is not an incentive for us to sin, because salvation delivers us from sin. Instead, it is a demonstration of the power of God's grace. In the early days of Christianity, there was no greater enemy to the church than the man who later wrote this letter: Saul of Tarsus, later the apostle Paul. Paul never tired of pointing out how much it glorified God to save a horrible man like him, making him a trophy of grace before all the world (see 1 Tim. 1:15-16). It is the same with you and me in our great sin, which is conquered by a greater grace.

Just as the chief end of man is to glorify God, so also the chief end of God is to glorify God. This is what God wants, for his glory to be displayed. When we talk about the glory of God, what we mean is the revealing of his perfections, the display of his glorious attributes.

When we say that God desires his own glory, what we mean is that he wants to reveal who He is, what He is like. It is a sin for us to seek self-glory; indeed, self-glory is the fountain of so many of our sins. But God is the One being worthy above all to be glorified. For God to desire His own glory is not only good, it is the highest possible good; for Him to be known is for glory to shine. As Paul wrote in Romans 11:36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever."

This tells us the purpose of creation. God created the universe to display His glory. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." Old Testament scholar E.J. Young writes, "The entirety of creation... speaks with voices clear and positive of the glory of the Holy God. Wherever we turn our eyes, we see the marks of His majesty, and should lift our hearts in praise to Him who is holy. This is His world, the wide theatre in which His perfect glory is displayed." The chief end of creation is to glorify God.

The same is true of redemption; in redemption, God achieves all His aims in creation. It was for the sake of God's glory that Jesus was born, lived, died and rose from the grave. On the night of Jesus' birth, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). On the night of His arrest, Jesus began praying in the Garden of Gethsemane in the same fashion: "Father... glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1). The same is also true when it comes to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Why are we born again? Why are we raised and seated together with Christ? So that God's glory may be seen forever through His grace in our lives.

In great art galleries, you will find collections of famous portraits. The men and women depicted on canvas lived long ago, when they were no doubt very important. But today, when crowds pass by admiring their portraits, it is not the men and women depicted who receive the praise, but the artist who painted them. That is what we admire, the skill, genius and passion of the painter, which endures long after the subjects are no longer remembered.

That is similar to the situation of God's work in our salvation. God saved us and is doing His powerful work of transformation in our lives, so that in eternity to come His handiwork might be displayed in glory. In eternity the Christian will be radiant in the righteous robes of Christ, beautiful in the holiness that has been perfected by God's Spirit, beloved of God the Father and one closest to His heart, His own child and heir of glory.

We will be like Moses, who on the one side of the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's army bearing down, trembled and feared even though he trusted God, but once he had passed through the parted waters and had seen the destruction of Pharaoh's host, and was safe and secure on the other side, he sang with unrestrained joy of the glory of Almighty God. In heaven, we will sing Moses' hymn: "The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him" (Exodus 15:2).

In our present lives we are often afflicted, we stumble in sin, and the best of us are not very impressive when it comes to holiness and faith. It may be hard to believe, but everyone who is now joined to Christ in faith will one day be perfect in holiness and kept in the reflected glory of God. What an encouragement it is now to know what we will be then.

Paul has something specific about God in mind when it comes to our salvation, namely, that it glorifies "the immeasurable riches of his grace." In creation, God displayed the glory of His power, wisdom, and beauty. But if His grace is to be displayed in glory, then God needed to exercise grace towards us. God glorifies His attributes by exercising them. He glorifies His sovereignty by reigning; He glorifies His justice by judging, and He glorifies His grace by saving undeserving sinners.

This helps us to partly answer the question of why God allowed sin to happen in the first place. God is not the author of sin (see 1 John 1:5), but since God is omnipotent and sovereign over all things (Rom. 11:36), the entry of sin was necessarily in accordance with His eternal decree. The question is Why? Paul gives one answer in Romans 11:32, "For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all." Our verse gives us another clue, that God ordained our salvation from sin to display the "immeasurable riches of his grace."

John Owen explains that our redemption from sin simultaneously increases the blessing to God's elect while magnifying His glory to a greater extent than did even the creation of the world: "God's purpose was to raise sinners to an inconceivably better condition than they were in before sin entered the world. God now appears more glorious than ever He did before. Now He is seen to be a God who pardons iniquity and sin and who is infinitely rich in grace... To save sinners through believing will be seen to be a far more wonderful work than to create the world out of nothing."

Paul writes that God glorifies "the immeasurable riches of his grace" through our salvation. What are these riches? To remind ourselves we can look back through this letter to the Ephesians. In chapter 1, verse 3, Paul says that God "blessed us with every spiritual blessing," and then he went on to tell us what they are. Verse 4 says we were chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be holy in His sight. What is the value of that? What is it worth to be elected by God to receive the holiness without which you cannot get to heaven? Verse 5 says God predestined us to be adopted as His own sons in Christ. Verse 7 speaks of Christ's blood, shed for our forgiveness. Verse 9 speaks of the knowledge of the mystery of God's will, granted us through His Word.

The riches of God's grace are revealed in His "kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." What is the value to God of the grace by which we are saved, but the price of His own beloved Son? What was the cost of this grace to Jesus Christ? Though He was the eternal, divine, and glorious Son of God, He set aside His glory (not His Divinity) to be born in poverty and undertake all the troubles of life in this world. He suffered the scorn and abuse of men and endured the terror of God's holy wrath on the cross, all to deliver into our hands this grace of God that truly is immeasurable in worth.

This is the grace given to us to be shown in eternity, AND ONLY ETERNITY WILL BE BIG ENOUGH for the full display of the infinite riches of God's grace for us in Christ Jesus.

HYMN

To God be the glory
Great things He has done
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin
And opened the life-gate that all may go in

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord
Let the earth hear His voice
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord
Let the people rejoice
Come to the Father
Through Jesus the Son
Give Him the glory
Great things He has done*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood
To every believer the promise of God
The vilest offender who truly believes
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives
(Refrain)

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our worship, when Jesus we see
(Refrain)

PRAYER

Father, we ask that you would be in the midst of the changes and the turmoil that we see all around us in the church and in the world in these days, that you would keep us, Lord, coming back again and again to the cross and there find our hope, our joy, our consolation there, to the praise of your glory, Amen.

BENEDICTION

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all this day and forevermore, Amen.

GREAT NEWS!

Tommy MacGregor recently attended an (online) Assessment Conference for the Ministry and he heard this week that he has been accepted as a candidate for training in Ministry, Full-time Word and Sacrament. Tommy is hoping to start his University Course at HTC on 7 September. We give thanks to God for Tommy and for this next step of following God's call. We assure Tommy of our prayers, encouragement, and full support as he begins this new chapter in his life.

REMEMBRANCE

On Friday 12 June the Nation marked the 80th anniversary of the infamous WW2 battle at St Valery-en-Caux. Often called "the other Dunkirk", it is a battle that lives on in infamy and poignancy, and still resonates within Highland communities to this day. After the final evacuation of Dunkirk, 4th June 1940, thousands of British soldiers were left behind in France - this comprised mainly of men from the Highland 51st regiment who held out for ten days of continuous fighting against overwhelming odds. There can hardly have been a village in the Scottish Highlands that was not affected by the loss of life and the ongoing suffering of their young men taken to prisoner of war camps. We continue to remember their sacrifice and pray for our armed forces.



ST VALERY-EN-CAUX 80TH ANNIVERSARY