

8TH AUGUST 2021

FERINTOSH PARISH CHURCH

WORSHIP AT HOME



www.ferintoshparishchurch.org.uk

"They lose nothing who gain Christ." (Samuel Rutherford)

PSALM 27

1 The Lord's my light and saving health,
who shall make me dismayed?

My life's strength is the Lord, of whom
then shall I be afraid?

2 One thing I of the Lord desired,
and will seek to obtain,
That all days of my life I may
within God's house remain;

3 That I the beauty of the Lord
behold may and admire,
And that I in his holy place
may rev'rently enquire.

4 Wait on the Lord, and be thou strong,
and he shall strength afford
Unto thine heart; yea, do thou wait,
I say, upon the Lord.

PRAYER

Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank you that you are our Father, that you know us through-and-through and that your word is able, first to find us and then to speak to us and then to transform us. We pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit this book that we read will live for us today in the grace and through the teaching of our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ and so we come to you, our eyes are upon you, our hearts are full of affection for you, our wills bowed before you and we say to you, Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. This we pray in Jesus our Saviour's name. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 SAMUEL 4: 1 - 11 NKJV

1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek.

2 Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field.

3 And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies."

4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

5 And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.

6 Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp.

7 So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!" And they said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before.

8 Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

9 Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!"

10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers.

11 Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

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

For many Christians, the subject of the Ark of the Covenant holds immense fascination. The Ark was a gold box of acacia wood in which the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments were kept, and which represented the presence of God within the holy of holies inside Israel's temple. The Ark of the Covenant fascinates even nonbelievers, who consider it a talisman for accessing divine or magical power. As Marcus Brody, sidekick to Indiana Jones in the fictional movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, stated, "An army which carries the ark before it is invincible."

1 Samuel chapter 4 begins a lengthy sequence known as "The Ark Narrative," spanning 1 Samuel 4:1-7:2. Having focused so far on the birth and calling of Samuel to be Israel's prophet and judge, he now disappears and is replaced by these three chapters that tell of the outcome of God's holy Ark. Here, in chapter 4, the Ark is presented as a focal point for "superstitious religion," that is, an idolatrous attempt to harness God's power for our own purposes on earth.

An attempt to manipulate or control God is common both in the Bible and in our contemporary world. Indeed, if there has been a recent generation when the kind of "superstitious religion" practiced by the elders of Israel has been especially in trend, that time must be now. According to the Bible, the purpose of our faith is that we might be brought to a saving knowledge of God (John 17:3), that we might grow in holiness (Eph. 4:20-24), and that we might serve the Lord while we make our pilgrim journey through this difficult life into the glory he has prepared for us in heaven (1 Pet. 2:9). Knowing God, growing in holiness, and serving the Lord and His gospel are the Bible's priorities for the Christian life. But what a far cry this view is from the motivation behind much popular Christianity and its presentation to the world.

In many cases, their actions consist of "human attempts to harness God's power." Dale Ralph Davis refers to this approach to Christianity as "rabbit-foot theology": "Our concern is not to seek God but to control him, not to submit to God but to use him.

So, we prefer religious magic to spiritual holiness; we are interested in success, not repentance." Churches who choose to depart from God's Word will often try religious actions in an attempt to provide a veneer of religion.

A sure sign of those who practice power religion, or "rabbit-foot theology," is an emphasis on religious and spiritual techniques. This is how the elders of Israel thought: they had a technology that should bring God's power. They did not turn their hearts to God. They did not seek God to find what troubled Him so much as to inflict them with defeat. They did not humble themselves and seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness (cf. Mt. 6:33). We see a similar attitude in Christians and churches that engage in month-long prayer vigils or fasts, revival meetings or week long prayer gatherings, but never consult the Bible for how God would have them amend their ways. The reliance is on a method or strategy rather than on God in His truth and grace.

What is the alternative to superstitious religion? It is the religion of the Bible, which Martin Luther summarised as the "theology of the cross." Biblical religion is not a series of techniques for manipulating God's good-will or harnessing God's power. Rather it is a humble appeal for God's mercy and grace, which He has offered through the priestly ministry of His Son, Jesus. Indeed, it was because of the failure of Israel's priests, like Hophni and Phinehas, that God sent His own Son to save us from sin and restore us to His blessing.

The Ark of the Covenant presented a picture of Christ in His perfect work - fulfilling God's law for us and shedding His atoning blood - so that God's presence and favour are with us through our union with Christ through faith. This is why the modern-day quests to find the Ark are misguided: the Ark has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. John the Baptist announced this when he said of Jesus: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). True religion is that which comes to God humbly and confessing our sin, trusting in the Lamb of God's precious blood, shed by Christ for sin on the cross, then seeking God's glory in our lives and seeking God's power that we might do His will and not our own.

Undoubtedly, we want God's power to help us with our struggles and trials, and in its proper place this desire is good and God-honouring. But have you realised that you must first deal with God Himself? You must come before Him on His terms, facing the demand for perfect righteousness that His holiness requires. This is the realisation that the arrival of the Ark should have inspired, for the Ark was designed to house God's holy law and also to provide the means of cleansing through the shed blood of the lamb. Realising this, the Israelite army might then have cried out not with loud cries of carnal enthusiasm but with laments for their sins and cries to God for mercy. With Christ in our midst through faith in His cross, we truly can prevail, knowing with Paul that nothing in heaven or on earth "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39).

Israel's elders called for the Ark, trusting "that it may come among us and save us" (1 Sam. 4:3). They were trusting it to save them - their box, their God-machine. Is there an 'it' that you are trusting in the place of God - some technique, some routine, some ritual, some spiritual approach of your own that in truth is designed to keep you from truly facing God? There is no it, no thing, by which we are saved - not even good things like our baptism, our church membership, or our knowledge of the Bible and theology. We are never saved by an it or a thing, but only by Him: the sovereign God of justice and mercy, who requires us to repent and be changed, to believe and seek His grace. Are you wrestling with some struggle, some proof that you need divine power for your salvation? Turn to God for mercy and grace in Jesus Christ. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," God says; "let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

HYMN

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace
Streams of mercy, never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise
Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it
Mount of Thy redeeming love

Here I raise my Ebenezer
Here there by Thy great help I've come
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure
Safely to arrive at home
Jesus sought me when a stranger
Wandering from the fold of God
He, to rescue me from danger
Interposed His precious blood

Oh, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be
Let that goodness like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, truly all blessings come from you. We thank you that in Jesus Christ you have filled us with blessings: the knowledge of the Lord, peace, the forgiveness of our sins, the transformation of our lives, a taste and indeed desire for the words that come to us from your mouth in the pages of Scripture. We thank you for the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ who has opened our eyes to see our need of Him and His all-sufficiency to be our Saviour here and hereafter. And we thank you for the way in which He has brought us to you so that we come to you as children to their heavenly Father. Lord, as you speak to us, make us conscious of how great your love for us is and so we look to you to lead us and to teach us from your word. We pray this in Jesus our Saviour's name. 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.



WORSHIP

Sunday Church services are at 11am and 12.15pm (if required). Seating in the Church has been limited to comply with level 1 guidelines and will remain limited for now. To attend you must contact the Session Clerk, Martin McLauchlan, by Friday at 5pm prior to the service to book a place.

To book, either visit the church website, and complete and submit the online booking form at: ferintoshparishchurch.org.uk/booking or email the Session Clerk at SessionClerk@ferintoshparishchurch.org.uk and he will send you a link to the Booking Form for you to complete and submit. If you do not have access to the Internet, phone him on 01349 830303 and leave your name and phone number and he will get back to you as soon as he can to take your details.

The Sunday Zoom service is at 6.30pm. If you would like to join the Zoom-service, please contact the Session Clerk at SessionClerk@ferintoshparishchurch.org.uk

Please continue to take care and stay safe.

HIGHLAND FOODBANK

Your donations are still urgently required to help the most vulnerable in our local area. Donations can be placed in the container in the vestibule as you enter the Church.