

5.12.21 am

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Date: 05 December 2021

Preacher: Reverend Mark Macleod

[0 : 00] Good morning everybody and welcome to our morning service. Special welcome to one or two visitors who are with us today. We're pleased to have Reverend Mark McLeod from Leaverborough here this morning.

He's doing a pulpit swap with our own minister who's preaching down there. The evening service at 6pm will be conducted by our minister, David McLeod.

And in the meetings during the week, pretty much as usual, Ladies Fellowship tomorrow night. Little Fishers on Tuesday morning from 10 till 12.

Road to Recovery on Tuesday evening at 7pm. And the prayer meeting is here in the building, again as usual, with the option to join by Zoom on Wednesday at 7.30.

Clubs on Friday. For the young people, Jam at 1.30 as usual. Please note that Connect starts at 3pm, not 3.30 on Friday as the kids are going for an ice skating trip to the Scaladale Centre.

[1 : 05] And then routed at 6.30 to 8.30. The service is next Sunday. God willing will be taken by the minister at the usual times of 11 and 6. A reminder of subscriptions to the church magazine if you haven't put them in yet.

You can either put some money into the plate, £24 for your subscription for next year. Or you can pay direct into the church's bank account. And there's notes about that on the table outside.

Highlight, again, Free Church of Scotland on safeguarding training. Looking for some volunteers who can train others in safeguarding.

If you're interested in that, you can contact Donald MacLeod. Donald.MacLeod at freechurch.org. I'd like to say thank you to everyone who contributed to the fundraising cafe for WFM yesterday.

In the community centre, a total of £611 was raised. Final intimation. Cross Women for Mission.

[2 : 13] I've got a CD of Christian songs recorded by Isabel McLeod of Carloway. And that's raising money for WFM. And there's two Christmas songs on that CD.

And you can order via email. Isabeljmack at hotmail.com. Or her phone number's up on the screen there.

And I meant to bring in a poster I printed off. Yes, you put it in the hall if you can't pick it up from the screen. But I'll do that later. So a total cost is £6. If you'd like to order one of those CDs or more, please do so in that way.

So these are all intimations. And it's a pleasure for me to pass on responsibility to Mark now to lead us in worship. Well, I'd just like to extend a welcome for myself as well.

It's good to be with you. I think I'm trying to remember last time I was here. I think it was just before lockdown, if I remember rightly. So quite a while ago now. So it's good to be with you. And it's good to come together to worship the Lord.

[3 : 26] And we're going to do just that. We're going to worship God. And we're going to begin by singing to his praise in Psalm 34. So Psalm 34 in the Sing Psalms, verse 1 to 9.

We'll sing that whole section there to God's praise. At all times I will bless the Lord.

I'll praise him with my voice. Because thy glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice.

Together let us praise the Lord. Exalted him with me.

I sought the Lord. His answer came. From fears he set me free.

[4 : 51] He looked to him and shine with joy. They are not good to shame.

This suffering man cried to the Lord. From him deliverance came.

The angel of the Lord surrounds. And guards continually.

He sets his people free.

Come taste and see. The Lord is good. Who trusts in him is best.

[6 : 05] Oh, fear the Lord. You saints with me. You will not be oppressed.

Amen. Well, we'll come before the Lord in prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we give thanks that we have this great privilege of coming into your presence on your day.

A day that is set aside from all others. A day which we can take rest from the things of the world.

And find rest for our souls as well as we seek to come before you in worship.

And our prayer is that we would indeed be able to come. And as we sang there to taste and see.

That the Lord is good. And how often we read that refrain in your word.

And maybe especially in the Psalms themselves. That God is good. And we don't just sing these words. We know these words to be true. Even in our own experience as well.

[7 : 20] As we reflect on the way in which you have worked in our lives. As we think about all that has happened in our lives to lead us even to this very place just now.

We can look back. Even sometimes at the difficult times and the darker times. We can look back and say that God is good. And we see your goodness surely most of all.

When we lift our eyes and look not at ourselves. But to the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There we see the goodness of God on display.

And as we think about the cross. And as we think about Jesus hanging there on that cross. We know that for many of those in the world. They would have looked at those scenes there and saw violence.

Saw death. Saw hatred. But yet we can look to the cross and think about Jesus there. And see something very different.

[8 : 22] There we see beauty. Love. We see mercy. And a love that is directed towards sinners like ourselves.

People who don't deserve anything. And we know that ourselves. We know something of ourselves. We know something of the sinfulness that lies in our hearts. We confess that we do not always have a clear and complete picture of just how depraved we are.

But we see something of it. And your word highlights that to us. Every time we come to your word.

Your word acts like a mirror. Revealing to us our hearts.

Showing us the depravity that is present there in the very core of our being. And it is imperative that we see that. It is imperative that we understand our spiritual state.

Our spiritual darkness. In order that then we might cling all the more to Christ. In order that then we might fall on our knees. And put our faith and trust in the Lord himself.

[9 : 25] And our prayer is that that would be true of every one of us present here. And all those listening in as well. That we might ourselves not just see sin in our hearts.

But that we might lift our eyes and see Christ. See Jesus. Lifted up on the cross. In order that we might be saved. And help us to remember that cost.

What it cost in order for our sins to be washed away. Sometimes we take these words upon our lips very easily and very lightly. And perhaps think little of our sin.

And think as though our sin is not a big deal. But your word reminds us that every single sin. One sin is enough for us to remain under the judgment of God for all eternity.

And to think that our saviour bore our sins on his back. Ought that not to make us thankful every day. And may that be the case.

[10 : 25] Every day may we think about what our saviour has done for us. And as we come in prayer. We bring before you the needs of the congregation here.

You know them all Lord. You know them those who are here and those who aren't here. You know their hearts. And you know the things that concern them.

The things that perhaps cause them anxiety and fear. And our prayer is O Lord. That even today as we gather. That you would minister your word to them. That you would meet them at the point of their need.

And we maybe especially remember those who are unwell. Those in hospital. We pray for Dr. Latham. We ask O Lord that your hand would be upon him. That you would grant him healing and restoration.

If that be your will. And for others as well perhaps who are suffering and struggling in different ways. Pray for those who are maybe suffering in the mind. We know maybe at this time of year.

[11 : 24] Many people struggle in different ways. With what this used to do with the mind itself. Our prayer is that you might grant them that peace that comes from above. That peace that passes all understanding.

And as we think about our physical and mental ailments that we have. Give us that sense of anticipation and expectation for the glory that is to come.

Because we are reminded in your word. That there is a day coming when we will enter into the new heaven and the new earth. And there we will be given renewed bodies. Renewed minds. Without all the illnesses and the defects that we have today.

There we will be glorified. Perfect. Able to worship the Lord in the way that you deserve to be worshipped. And help us to think about that. Especially when we go through our difficulties here in this life.

That there is an eternity to come. Where we will be in the presence of our Lord. So continue with us now. Pray for David as he leads the worship down in the south.

[12 : 26] Harris. We pray oh Lord that you would bless them as they gather too. And all the gatherings of your people throughout Harris and throughout our islands here. Meet with us. Do us good we pray.

Cleanse us from our sins. We ask it all for Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Well do the young ones they come down to the front.

Say a few words to the young ones just now. Hello there.

There's a few of you. You get the floor seat. That's unfair. Yeah. Wow.

Good to see you all. How are you today? Good. Good. Yes. Nice to see you. It's a lovely day today isn't it? It's a beautiful day today. And my journey to church today.

[13 : 25] I'll tell you this. It was a lot better than my journey to church last weekend. It's last weekend. I don't know if you remember last weekend. Remember there were storms and all sorts last weekend. I was preaching.

I was meant to be preaching at Inverness last weekend. But because of all the ferry cancellations. I ended up not getting. Not leaving here till late on Saturday. And I went the Skyway.

Made my way through Sky. And reached. I didn't reach Inverness until 11 o'clock at night. On Saturday night. So that wasn't. It was very late. And it was so late I actually missed one of the services.

Services. Unfortunately. But I made it anyway. But the road was. It was very quiet. There was hardly a car on the road. And it was dark obviously. Because it was night time. And it was also. It wasn't as white here. But it was quite snowy. In different parts as well. So the road was very. Very white. And I was very thankful for something. I was thankful for something called.

[14 : 22] Cat's eyes. Does anyone know what cat's eyes are? I don't mean. Actual eyes. Of cats. I'm talking about something on a road. Anyone know what cat's eyes are? Oh. What do you think?

What does that look like? They are. The red lights. Or white or red lights going on the. That's it. Yeah. That's exactly what they are. So you've got two lanes on the road. Well. On your main roads. We don't have as many of them here. But in the mainland there's more of them. So there's two lanes. And then there's the white line in the middle. And there's these little reflective lights. In the road. And they show you where it goes at night.

When you can't really see. Where you're going. Your light shines. And it reflects. And you see the direction of the road. So you can tell which way you're turning. How to stay on the road. To make sure that you're kept safe.

Well. I always. Whenever I see these cat's eyes. And I was very thankful for them last weekend. But whenever I see them. I remember a verse. In the Bible. As a verse.

[15 : 15] We're actually going to sing it in a few moments. It's in Psalm 119. And it's verse 105. And it says this. Your word is a light. That guides me on my way.

Because the Bible. Is kind of like our cat's eyes. Our cat's eyes. Because this world is very dark. And the Bible. Is like a light. That shows us the way to go.

In the midst of all the darkness. And when God's word. Lights the way for us. Just like the cat's eyes. Light the road in front of you. His word leads us. And it leads us first of all.

To Jesus. We put our faith in Jesus. But then after we put our faith in Jesus. When we believe in Jesus. Do you think. Then at that point. We don't need God's word anymore. Once you believe in Jesus.

Can we just get rid of the Bible then? No. We can't get rid of the Bible. We still need it. Because God's word. Yes it leads us to Jesus. But then. It leads us along. And it shows us.

[16:08] How to live. It shows us how to be Christians. What to do. What to say. What to do in order to. To enjoy life. As God designed it. So. We are very much reliant.

On. On the light of God's word. Directing us all the time. And keeping us safe. So. Next time you're driving. Well. You won't be driving. Will you? Anyone here old enough to drive? You are.

I thought you might say yes. Yes. Another one. Well. When you're in a car. And somebody else is driving. If you look out the. The windscreen. You'll say. Well. Yes. If you've got a good light on your bike.

Yes. Because you need a big light to reflect. Back to see the little lights. And let those cat's eyes remind you. That that's exactly what the Bible is like for us. Directing us and guiding us.

In the darkness of this world. You got a question? Yeah. Yes. You happy with that? Very good. We're going to sing that psalm now.

[17:02] I. Do this. Do this. Do this. Do this. For airplanes. The. The wind turbines. I have red lights. Yeah. Well. That's true. Yeah. You're growing my illustration now.

I can spiritualize all these things for the next children's address. We'll sing now then. We'll sing in Psalm 119. So you stay for the singing. Is that right? So Psalm 119.

We're going to sing. And we're going to sing in verse 105. So this is the verse that I mentioned there. Your words. A lamp. That shines before my feet.

It is a light that guides me on my way. The oath that I have taken. I have confirmed. That all your righteous laws I will obey.

So a picture of the light of the Lord guiding us on the way. So we'll sing the whole section there to God's praise. That all your words. That shines before my feet.

[18:05] It is a light that guides me on my way.

The oath that I have taken and confirmed That on your righteousness I will obey O Lord, you know that I have suffered much Recept my life according to your word Accept the willing praises of my mouth Instruct me in your righteousness, O Lord I will not disregard your glory all

Though constantly my life is in my hands Although the wicked set a scale for me I have not left the path of pure romance Your statutes are my heritage always And every day they make my heart rejoice My heart is set on keeping your degrees And to the very end they are my choice

We're going to read now from God's word We're going to read a passage in the book of Psalms Psalm 73 Psalm 73 And we'll read from the beginning A Psalm of Asaph Truly God is good to Israel To those who are pure in heart But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled My steps had nearly slipped

For I was envious of the arrogant When I saw the prosperity of the wicked For they have no pangs until death Their bodies are fat and sleek They are not in trouble as others are They are not stricken like the rest of mankind Therefore pride is their necklace Violence covers them as a garment Their eyes swell out through fatness Their hearts overflow with follies They scoff and speak with malice Loftily they threaten oppression They set their mouths against the heavens And their tongue struts through the earth Therefore his people turn back to them And find no fault in them And they say, how can God know?

[22:24] Is there knowledge in the most high? Behold, these are the wicked Always at ease They increase in riches All in vain have I kept my heart clean And washed my hands in innocence For all the day long I have been stricken And rebuked every morning If I had said I will speak thus I would have betrayed the generation of your children But when I thought, how do you understand this?

It seemed to me a wearisome task Until I went into the sanctuary of God Then I discerned their end Truly you set them in slippery places You make them fall to ruin How they are destroyed in a moment Swept away utterly by terrors Like a dream when one awakes O Lord, when you rouse yourself You despise them as phantoms When my soul was embittered When I was pricked in heart I was brutish and ignorant I was like a beast toward you Nevertheless, I am continually with you You hold my right hand You guide me with your counsel And afterward you will receive me to glory Whom have I in heaven but you And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you My flesh and my heart may fail But God is the strength of my heart And my portion forever For behold, those who are far from you shall perish

You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you But for me, it is good to be near God I have made the Lord God my refuge That I may tell of all your works Amen and we pray for God's blessing On that portion of his word I'm going to sing now Before we look at that psalm We're going

learned that fact but the psalmist here he's doubting that fact he knows the truth of it but he's doubting it and you see he's doubting it there in verse two so truly surely god is good but as for me he says my feet had almost stumbled my steps had nearly slipped for i was envious of the arrogant he's envious of the arrogant when i saw the prosperity of the wicked so the psalmist he's looking at the lives of of the ungodly the the wicked here and he sees well wait a second they're not struggling that's how he sees it they're not struggling they've got no worries at all they seem to just be enjoying life they seem to be prospering everything seems to be going fine for them they don't seem to have the same kind of um health worries that that others have um they they don't seem to have a fear of death that's basically what he's saying they don't seem to be fearing death and the psalmist is trying to make sense of all this why is it that that they're getting on so so well because the psalmist knows well you know there are people who are living overtly sinful lives these are people who are overtly in rebellion to to god um and and they make it known the psalmist is saying there they actually speak about these things they speak against god in uh verse nine he says they set their mouths against the heavens these aren't people who are spiritually neutral these are people who are speaking out against god and then in verse 11 um they say uh how can god know in other words god doesn't know um is their knowledge in in the most high um so that they're an act of rebellion um against the lord himself and yet they seem to be at ease you know life seems to be so easy for them um they seem to be prospering and i think when we when you look at the psalmist's confusion here i think we can we can understand that uh i'm quite sure that all of us all of us who are the lords here today i'm sure at some point you've had similar thoughts yourselves you know when you see the the the spiritually rebellious the the spiritually uh proud when you see them and they get on so well uh it's hard to make sense of that um spiritually speaking and in verse two he's struggling so much with these things that you see that it almost causes him to fall he says his feet my feet almost stumbled when i was thinking about this as in the psalmist and the psalmist is thinking about this my feet almost stumbled he becomes envious um envious of the ease of the wicked um envious of the the prosperity of the ungodly and just how easy their life is and he becomes so envious of that that he actually starts to desire what they had there's an element of he's actually looking at the world what the world and actually desiring that wanting what they have and we can again i think very easily um fall into that kind of way of thinking you know when when you see the the the relative ease and the the the prosperity that's perhaps enjoyed by those who are outside of christ you you're tempted the devil uses that and he he tempts you and he tempts you very much into desiring that kind of way of life especially when you are struggling and when you're going through all sorts of spiritual hardships and spiritual struggles you know all these things all these burdens on you and when you feel the weight of that and see the the ungodly prospering that that temptation to to desire what the world has that temptation becomes very strong but the reason the reason that we think like that is because we don't actually have the full picture and the thing is the wicked aren't at ease um the wicked aren't

[40 : 07] prospering and prospering that's how it can seem to us and those who are outside of christ we look at them and we we think they're prospering and you know the way the world is just now and social media and the instagram culture and all that goes with that as well you just see what's on the front and that's all it is it's it's it's a facade it's it's a front of ease a front of prosperity a front of joy and peace when actually behind it there is that there are struggling people there are people who are suffering and and struggling in lots of different ways but that's not what's presented of course and the devil makes sure that that's not what you see but you just see the the good things the the the joy and the external peace when actually inside there's all sorts of difficulty but what that does is it can lead you into this trap as the devil sets this trap it can lead you into the the trap of of wanting that for yourself and that make no mistake it is the devil is behind that um the the devil is trying to to fool us and to fool us into thinking that that it's those who are outside of christ who are truly happy and those outside of christ who truly have hope and peace and joy but but it's it's a a mirage that's all it is it's a deception and and you know the devil if it's one thing he's good at it's it's deceiving he's exceptionally good at that and he sets up this mirage and it's effective a mirage that that lures you in and a mirage that that draws you to to to want these things and to take this path of of wickedness and that's what the psalmist is struggling with there in that first section so as he's looking prosperity of the wicked he's having all these thoughts and then next section in verse 13 to 17 he starts to look at himself so he stops looking outside and he starts to think about himself and in verse 13 we read there all in vain have i kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence in vain i've done this he's saying for all the day long that i have been stricken i am

rebuked every morning so the psalmist's problem here it's not just that the that the wicked are prospering um his issue is that he himself is struggling so so yes the wicked are prospering but he is struggling he's saying i i've been stricken i'm rebuked uh every every morning he's finding life exceptionally difficult um spiritually he's finding things very hard indeed and he's basically saying to to the lord here i've tried to live a godly life i i've tried not to follow the path of of wickedness but it's not benefited me my life is if anything harder than than those who are outside of of the lord and again we know what that's that's like because um we are a people who who seek to um those who are the lord's we seek to live according to the law of god um we we seek to live um putting the lord putting our our savior um number one in our lives and secretly uh i know our theology might be different but but secretly we we think to ourselves that um if we do that um that will be will be okay that you know as long as we you know put our faith in christ and and follow the god's god's will that will be fine and that he'll take away all the difficulties we have in life and all the hardships we have in life now our theology tells us that's not the case that's prosperity gospel kind of thinking but i'm talking about in our experience we think that um we think that yeah if i'm if i'm worshiping the lord trusting in the lord then then i'll be fine he'll take he'll take all my all the difficult things that are away from me and then you you find that that he doesn't um he doesn't do that and not only does he not remove our um afflictions and hardships but sometimes um like the psalmist experiences here sometimes it feels

like he piles them on us um even more than he piles them on the wicked i stress that this is to do with our perception i'm not suggesting this is the reality but that's how we can often feel like like these things are very heavy upon us much more so even than than the wicked themselves and that's how the psalmist feels that's how he that's his experience it might not be the theology in his head but that's what he's going through that's what he's experiencing at the time and and as he goes on to try and understand um why all these things are he finds it painful painful to even think about it in verse um 16 there but when i thought how to understand this he says it seemed to me a wearisome task so he's trying to figure it out he's trying to figure out why why this is and he's trying to figure it out by consulting his own wisdom and consulting his own his own um logic using his own discernment trying to figure out why is this the the way it is and whenever we do that whenever we look merely inside ourselves um for for for these uh answers answers to difficult questions like that can be incredibly painful um and you may have experienced that you know in terms of even psychologically mentally spiritually looking for these answers in yourself it's it's very very difficult indeed and he's struggling and he's struggling to understand why why this is the case and then you get a turning point in the psalm and this is the the hinge moment of the psalm and it's it's a key um version verse 17 so the whole psalm turns on this and that's him going to the worship of god he goes to worship the lord we read there but when i thought how do you understand this it seemed to me a wearisome task it was tiring him out spiritually mentally draining him until i went into the sanctuary of god then i discerned their end see that's the key that's the turning point up until this point he's been looking for answers to all of these difficult questions and he's been looking for these answers in himself but now now he goes to the place of worship he goes before the lord himself and as he comes before the lord here he gets a proper perspective now now he finally understands see when he enters the the the worship of god here what happens is he starts to see things from god's perspective um he starts to see things with that eternal perspective um with that with that heavenly perspective and that that is exactly what we need and when he does that it dawns on him wait a second but when he when he sees the whole the bigger picture he says no the the wicked they aren't at all in a state of comfort they're not at all in a in a state of ease in a state of prosperity that's not the case they're in a perilous state he realizes that now they're on a road to destruction a road that all of us at one time and we're on a road to to judgment itself and he realizes when he gets the bigger picture he realizes how can i be envious of people like that how can i be envious of the wicked when when he realizes the the eternal reality of what lies ahead for for those who are outside of of the lord he he realizes wait a second they're not the ones who are prospering they're not prospering at all in fact it's the lord's people we are the ones who are rich we are the ones who are prospering and we are rich beyond measure and he sees all that by coming into the worship of god that's the point when he was just thinking about himself going through these things in his own mind he wasn't understanding he was getting lost doubt all sorts difficulties coming in but then he comes into the worship of the lord and then he understands and you know that's one of the reasons why that the worship of god is so important now worship of god is important anyway because god

commands us to worship you don't need any other reason to worship other than that but it's it's important for these reasons as well because it's when he comes into the house of god the place of worship that's when he gets this right perspective and that's what we need ourselves as well in a day as i was mentioning at the beginning in a day when the world seems to take up so much of our attention and so much of our thinking so much of our mindset in a day like that it's it's more important than ever to come aside from these things and to to to worship the lord because when you're doing that when you're actually coming into the the worship of the lord you're putting god at the very center of your thinking and and you have no idea how important that is see when the world is constantly trying to get in coming before god putting god at the center of your thinking it gives you a right perspective the devil doesn't want us to have that perspective he wants us to have a perspective that's influenced by the world but by coming before the lord we're given that eternal perspective that perspective that comes from the the lord himself um some of you you know you'll you'll be aware of these um puzzles on some of these game shows that are on tv when you um you get a a picture it's on catchphrase if anyone watches catchphrase you get you get a picture and the you know the squares blocking the the picture and the idea is that you have to get the questions right and then when you get the questions right you know a little square is removed and you get to see a little bit of the picture and you have to guess what this picture is and of course the more questions you get right the more of the the squares disappear until you eventually see what it is and and when you when you first see that and when when there's just a little square that's empty when when one square is taken away you can't really see you can't really tell what the picture is you're only seeing a really a tiny part of it and when we look at things from from our earthly perspective that's what we're doing we're trying to understand ourselves we're trying to understand our lives we're trying to answer these big questions but from from a very limited viewpoint we just don't see the whole picture we don't see the big picture at all but when you come into the worship of god and when you put god at the very center of your thinking you see it from from his perspective and and he doesn't just see a part of the picture he sees the whole picture indeed he has created the picture it helps us to understand all of these things and when the psalmist comes to that realization he realizes that you know what even when i'm going through these tough times and even though i might be going through difficulties in life he knows that ultimately ultimately he is secure in the hand of the lord and he had to go he had to go before the lord in worship to actually um see that and and he says to himself as for the wicked these people that i was envious of before now he realizes he has absolutely no reason at all to be envious of them now he realizes how terrible their state actually is so at the beginning of the psalm he's looking at the wicked seeing how they're prospering and then secondly he's looking at himself and comparing himself to the world and saying why why am i struggling why am i suffering so much and now for this last third of the the psalm um he he puts his eyes firmly on the lord you see this trajectory of his focus turning to to god himself and then you have that amazing section of of praise there in that that last um third of the psalm where he where he he realizes really that far from from feeling abandoned by the lord and and and doubting the lord now now he proclaims his his trust in the lord is his confidence in the lord and he comes to life and yeah famously in that verse 23 nevertheless i am continually with you continually you hold me uh by my right hand see now now that his his mind has been has been so focused on on the worship of god now he sees that actually god hasn't left me god hasn't left me at all god's been there and god's been there the whole time continually holding me taking me by the right hand so by the time you get to the end of the psalm you realize that the problem the psalmist has is that he's been basically looking in the wrong place he was so focused on the wicked and so focused on the the the worldly that he didn't realize that this whole time the lord was with him and the lord was continually with him and the lord wasn't just with him but we read there that the lord is actually holding him by his right hand and if you're the lord's here today if your faith and trust is in the lord jesus christ and you have to remember that that's true of you as well you can say the lord is holding me holding me by the right hand and you think about think about the hand of of jesus um you think about the hand of jesus in the in the in the gospel accounts that that that same hand that that touched and um cleansed the leper um that that same hand that um raised jairus's daughter to life um that same hand that took took hold of um peter remember when peter was walking on the water he was trying to and he was sinking because there was doubt the hand of the lord takes him and of course that hand that ultimately was was nailed on the cross at calvary itself that hand the hand of our lord is a hand that grips us today and he will not let go we might sometimes loosen our grip of his hand but his hand will never um let go of his people continually so doesn't matter what

we're going through um whether we're on the the mountaintops of blessing or whether we're struggling and in all sorts of difficult valleys whether you're full of assurance faith or whether you're pretty much on your knees and in doubt in all situations in every case the lord is with us and he's holding us by the right hand and that means that you'll never fall your legs might spiritual legs might give give way but you'll never fall ultimately you never fall and you'll never fall because the lord has a hold of those who who are his people and it's not just that he's holding us we read there that he's he's guiding us in verse 24 you guide me with with your counsel and afterward you will receive me to glory so it's the image isn't that god is holding our hand and we're sort of just going wherever we want to go and sort of taking god with us like some kind of a lucky charm as we as we make our way through life that's not the image here the image is that he's the one leading us you know like i was saying to the the young ones with the cat's eyes he's the one who's who's who's guiding us and that actually is a wee bit confusing as well and the reason that's confusing is that well that when you follow the logic through that means that well when i do go through these times of trial and hardship and difficulty that means that god is leading me here if it's the case that he's guiding me if it's the case that he's leading me and that is true you have to caveat that a wee bit um and say that sometimes sometimes that the dangers and difficulties we face are actually to do with our sinful disobedience

that that's true that that is part of the picture but not all the time other times when we enter into trials when we enter go through periods of suffering in in our lives it's not to do with our sin but but the lord himself he leads us and he guides us and that can be difficult when you think about that the lord leading us into to these valleys but you have to remember see the verse says there about receiving me into glory ultimately he's leading us and guiding us on a route that's leading to glory and that's that's that's that's the important point here the the path to a a mountaintop i don't know how many people have climbed hills or mountains but a path to a mountaintop very often include ups and downs it's not just a nice steady upward climb very often there's ups and there's downs there's there's difficult climbs and then there's descents all the way along until you eventually and get to the the the top of of the mountain itself and that's what the christian life is like it's never well very rarely um is it nice and steady you have the ups and you have the downs as well but when you're tired and when you're um weary and when you feel like giving up like the psalmist you feel like he almost was wanting to give up at the beginning of this um psalm here but when you're in that kind of situation remember what the psalmist discovers here the lord is leading he's leading and he's leading you to a glory that is far greater far better than than we could ever even begin to imagine and everyone's journey is different lord takes us all on a different journey he's not going to take us all in the same road the same path destination is the same the end goal is the same but the journey there is is different for for for everyone and when we consider that that the lord is leading us the lord is is guiding us we can say to ourselves so why why would we envy what the wicked have why why would we ever envy the the world we're the ones who are rich even when we go through the difficulties even when we go through the the harder times we are rich in the lord jesus christ himself and our desire isn't a material gain um our desire isn't worldly pleasure um you see there in verse 25 our desires the lord whom have i in heaven but you what do i have lord but you and there is nothing on earth that i desire besides you see at the beginning of the psalm that the problem is he's looking to the wicked and because he's focusing on the wicked and he's focusing on the world he starts to desire those things that's what happens what you spend your attention on what you spend your focus on very quickly becomes the very thing that you actually um desire and that's what he was deciding but now that he comes to the house of god now that he's in the place of worship now that his focus is on the lord himself no no here he finds that his desire becomes the lord his chief desire is the lord himself and my prayer is that i'll be that'll be true for for all of us here that that our desire would be for christ himself the lord himself and that as we gather in in worship not just here not just in a public setting um but even in your homes that that you'd be able to say what the what the psalmist is saying here that there's nothing on this earth that i desire apart from you oh lord even when the devil tries to draw us to the things of the world and show us the things that might appeal to our sinful flesh we can say no no nothing in this earth i desire apart from you oh lord and then in the end there in verse 26 we can say my flesh and my heart may fail you know what my my flesh and my heart my life these things may may fail but god is the strength of my heart and my portion forever

[60 : 21] that's the conclusion the conclusion that he comes to there so let our eyes move away from the distractions of this world and let your eyes as well not just focus on yourself and sort of

comparing yourself to the world and comparing yourself to those who are outside of christ um let your eyes be lifted up and let your eyes be fixed on our rock our redeemer the lord and savior jesus christ himself and if we do that um all our difficulties and problems and doubts and questions that we have all of that will be put in in perspective um it'll result in your fears evaporating um your doubts been taken away and you'll be given a renewed sense of the peace and joy that we have in the lord himself so let these words be our confession as we journey through this earthly pilgrimage nevertheless continually oh lord i am with thee thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me thou with thy counsel while i live willst me conduct and guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide whom have i in the heavens high but thee oh lord alone and in the earth whom i desire besides thee there is none my heart and flesh doth faint and fail but god doth fail me never for of my heart god is the strength and portion forever amen amen we'll bow our heads and come before him in prayer heavenly father we give thanks that when we come to your word we do not just find a fact book of theology we do not just find theological truths and theological facts but we find much in your word that opens our eyes to the experience of living life as one of your children and maybe especially the psalmist but in other parts of scripture as well where we see the psalmist at times struggling and having questions and and questions that we experience ourselves as well and as we seek to work through these questions how helpful it is to come to passages like this as we see a fellow brother in the lord go through these things and as we see him coming to an understanding by coming to the place of worship by getting that heavenly perspective our prayer is that we might have that as well because we are acutely aware that the devil will do all he can to try and draw us away the devil will try and take our attention and he'll try and lure us to the lusts of this world and as we mentioned earlier on we confess that we are in a day where these things are so readily available to us and in our faces and in our ears constantly but our prayer is that we might heed your word that we might by coming before you in worship be given to focus our eyes and our attention on the lord himself and then we will begin to understand we will understand our spiritual condition we will understand where it is that you are leading us through and we will understand where it is you are leading us to to the glory that is beyond so strengthen us help us equip us for that task keep us focusing our eyes on christ do us good we ask it all for jesus sake amen well we're going to conclude by singing those words that i refer to there at the end of our service and so

psalm 73 and in the scottish psalter and verse 23 to 26 nevertheless continually oh lord i am with thee thou dost me hold by my right hand and still uphold us me and remember when when you're singing these verses remember what's happened beforehand remember all the struggles that he's had you know it's important to do that when we especially when we come to you've probably sang that section multiple times before um it's good to remember that the context of the whole psalm and understand where he's come from the struggles he's had the questions gives you a renewed understanding of the verses and god-willing uh words that you can take to yourselves and in prayer as well so we'll sing that section to the praise of god oh lord oh lord i am with thee thou dost behold thou dost me thou dost me conduct and guide while i live a

Christ, lead me to a vine. Whom have I in the heavens high, but the old Lord alone?

And in the earth whom I desire, besides thee there is none.

My flesh and heart doth faint and faint, but God doth fill me never.

[67 : 09] For of my heart God is the strength and portion forever.

Now may the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit continue with you all now and forevermore.

Amen.