

The Mouth of the Lord has spoken

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Preacher: Rev. David Robertson

[0 : 0 0] Good morning and a warm welcome to the service this morning. It's good to see everybody here with us this morning. A particularly welcome to those who are with us from Scalgo Free Church and if there's any who are visiting the island on holiday or with us for the first time then you're particularly welcome.

The service this morning will be conducted by the Reverend David Robertson. I'll say a little bit about David in just a moment. We're delighted to have him and Annabella's wife with us this morning.

After the service, tea and coffee will be served. Please stay if you're able to. Those who have volunteered to help, there's a number of intimations as has become traditional here.

So give me a couple of minutes please. Those who have volunteered to help with the Christmas funding, which is this coming Saturday from 1 o'clock till half past 3.

In the community centre here. Those who volunteer to help, please meet in the committee room at the back there for five minutes at the close of the service. Evening service will be at 6pm conducted by myself, God willing, and youth fellowship meets here at half past 7.

[1 : 1 3] David's Bible study, 8 o'clock as usual in Jiraclip. And the session prayer meeting, the monthly prayer meeting for the session will be in the match tomorrow evening at half past 7.

There's a prayer meeting for the forthcoming road to the company group on Tuesday at 8 in the community centre here. And the first group fellowship meets in the Church of Scotland Hall as usual at half past 7 on Tuesday.

Prayer meeting Wednesday at half past 7 till the cruises and Christianity Explorers continues on Thursday in the Italian Embrace. Prayer meeting Wednesdays. All the ladies from the Scalpy and North Harris congregations are invited to an open evening in the Scalpy Community Centre on Thursday, 10th of December at half past 7 to find out what Women for Mission WFM is all about and hear about the latest projects.

You want to hear a wee bit in advance, Debra Cobble is here today and please have a word with her and she'll fill the air in the heart. Services next Wednesday will be conducted at 11am by myself, God willing.

And tomorrow, not tomorrow, next Sunday is the Sunday that the children go to the stable at Stockinish. So could the wee ones meet in the Tourist Information Park at 10.50am and they'll be back in time for the close of the service.

[2 : 3 3] 6pm service next Sunday evening will be taken by Mr Donnie McLeod of the Faith Mission and after that service it's hoped that we'll have a joint fellowship with the Church of Scotland to potentially discuss a faith mission, tent mission in some point next year.

So that's next Sunday evening. The joint Sunday school Christmas party with the Church of Scotland is to be held on Saturday 19th December from 1.30am to 4 at Sir East Scott School and the Nations of Bacon will be gratefully received.

I think these are all the intimations. I've probably forgot something but too bad, you can just talk about that at the end. I just want to now again welcome the Reverend David Robertson and Annabelle who's over there, his wife with the Red Jacket.

It's great to have both of you here with us this morning. David has been a minister in the Free Church for over 30 years. Since 1986.

Since 1986 you can do the maths yourself and he's the moderator of the Free Church General Assembly this year. He's also an author and an ecologist and he's been aware of his work and playing for it over these last few months.

[3 : 53] So we're delighted to have David and Annabelle with us this morning. We're a great gospel partnership and we want to extend to you a warm Harris welcome.

Which I'm told and I've experienced is considerably warmer than the Lewis welcome. You may have had a warm welcome in Lewis but it won't really compare. We wanted just as well to give you a wee gift for your time in Harris.

David is a man who loves a good hat. He mentioned yesterday that he has a black hat and a long black coat and he was told that having clad himself for that attire he was ready for the stormy, the Lewis communions.

And well that's good but we wanted to be ready for the Harris communion as well. So there's a Harris queen hat for your time here. Thank you. And Annabelle I know is very excellent in terms of hospitality.

I've eaten in the manse before and been well looked after there. So there's some placemats. Harris Tweed as well. Placemats for you to take back to Dundee.

[5 : 00] And when you go back to Dundee you can tell everybody there how the welcome in Harris was considerably warmer than the welcoming seat in Lewis. So we pray God's blessing on you and we look forward to hearing God's word for you this morning.

Can you stand to sing? Can you stand to sing? Can you stand to sing? Can you pray? Okay. Yeah it is my pleasure to be here. It's great to be here. I feel when I was a student in the Free Church College I was on Islay and I visited this elderly lady and I knew one phrase of Gala.

So I spoke to her. I said that one phrase and it must have been good because she started talking to me in Gala. And I had to go oh no I'm really sorry I don't have the Gala. And she said to me words I've never forgotten.

Oh dear. Oh dear. A preacher without Gala is like a bird without a wing. So we maybe won't fly but I hope David McLeod will, his Gala will improve considerably in order that we can fly.

But I do want to say also in my capacity as moderating the Free Church that it's great to be in this new congregation. Those of you from Scalpe you're not a new congregation and it's a privilege to meet you as well.

[6 : 15] But it's great to be particularly here. These are exciting times. You're very welcome in the church. We have a new congregation just started in the past month in Montrose.

And it was lovely to be there a couple of weeks ago. In Edinburgh a few years ago we were talking about reducing the number of churches from three to one.

We've just started our seventh church in Edinburgh. Which is just really very very encouraging. So in the midst of a lot of discouragement throughout the church in Scotland.

It's great to see these kind of encouragements. And whatever denomination you're from we want to work together with all the Lord's people. And that's what we're here for this morning.

To worship him. If you're a visitor here today as I am. Then we pray that God would bless you as we worship together. We're going to begin by standing to sing Psalm 84.

[7 : 14] We'll sing verses 1 to 9. Let's stand and sing these words. Let's stand and sing these words. Let's stand and sing these words.

Let's stand and sing these words.

Let's see. Let's fly your lips are welnst Fellowship. Let's shout and sing these words. Let's Pierce in shmap the Shane visae.

In thy known answers where she said Her young one's heart may bring O thou almighty Lord of hosts Who art by God and King Blessed are they in thy house That will be ever given grace Blessed is the man who sent the war In which our God thy peace Who passed in third of India's name Then into India wells

O thou the rain that falleth down The pools with water fills So they from strength and weary they go Still forward unto strength Until in Zion they appear Before the Lord at hand Lord God of hosts my prayer hear O Jacob talk it here See God our shield Through God the face Of thine anointed ear

[10:53] Let's pray Lord our God We come and bow before you As those who know that your dwelling place is lovely But as those who are conscious of our own sin And our own weakness We thank you that we are able to come into your presence Not because of our own good deeds Not because of our works Not because of our goodness But we are able to come into your presence Because of your mercy And your grace And because of the atoning sacrifice Of Jesus Christ We bless you that you call your people together From different backgrounds

From different circumstances But that we are all one in Christ Jesus We thank you Lord for your goodness to the people here We thank you for those who seek to worship you here And Scalpe and throughout Harris And indeed throughout this whole nation Lord our God We ask Or we come rather to confess That your church is not as it should be That there has been so much That is wrong And we need to repent of But we bless you our Lord That you are infinitely patient And that you continue to call your people To renewal And reformation And repentance We ask for your work in this place We pray oh Lord our God That wherever your people gather In whatever church The Church of Scotland The Free Presbyterian

Whatever church Where your word is proclaimed And your people seek to serve you Lord we ask That there your blessing would follow We pray for your blessing in particular Upon the congregation here And in Scalpe And we ask our God That where there are particular needs Illness Discouragement Unemployment That you would provide We pray for those Connected with our fellowships Who as yet do not know you We ask that you would work in their lives We pray your blessing Upon the children We ask oh Lord That from their very earliest days They would seek And follow you And we ask your blessing Upon our nation Lord we need Your Holy Spirit To come and to change So much And we pray that you would use us In that process And we think of your people Throughout the world Especially those who face

Real persecution Those in Iraq And in Syria Those in northern Nigeria Where many hundreds of Christians Have been killed We ask our God That you would have mercy Upon your people And we cry out Together with the saints In revelation How long oh Lord How long We pray that you would bless Every part of our worship Here this morning That as we sing your praise That we would understand And sing With understanding And feeling That as we hear your word We would hear it as it really is The word of God Not the word of man That we would truly have fellowship With one another That if we as yet Do not know you We would come to know you And that your blessing Would be upon all From the children In the Sunday school To the oldest person here Grant our God That as we go from this place We would say truly It was good for us

To be here Because the Lord Was here For we ask it in your name Amen Right boys and girls Come on down to the front Here Okay Let's see We go I'll go right here So I can see Okay Now this is really important Because I don't know your name So Sometimes Yeah We're going to We're going to talk And I hope I'm going to be the one Who's going to do all the talking Alright Let's sing Just a little bit Because we're getting near Towards it Let's think a little bit About Christmas Any of you get Christmas presents?

[15 : 32] Yeah Anyone not want Christmas presents this year? No? No You all have got Christmas presents Okay Let's just think If you could What would be the nicest present You could get?

If I could buy you a present If I was I don't know If I was as rich as your minister Could I Could I If I was a multi-millionaire And I could buy you anything What would you like?

The thing you like the most I'll tell you mine I mean Motor button Okay I like it more Nice Big Harvey Davis But That's not going to happen So What would you like the most What's your name?

Alistair What would you like Alistair? A water A water A water A water A water A water A water A water Okay Ah Motor Alright Very good That's really impressive Anyone else?

Got any particular What's your name? Okay What would you like to? I'm going to have to come here So I can bring Let me find my water You tell me What would you like to do?

[16 : 55] Wouldn't you? That's lovely Wow I hope you get that Anyone else? You're all very modest in that Right First of all What's your name?

Okay And Do you like magic? Okay Are we really good? All these different kinds of things That That That people like To get at Christmas Well I watched a film I mean just a kind of We film That we showed In our church From About people Who were getting Shoe boxes Now That doesn't sound great A shoe box But I These shoe boxes Are all covered in Christmas paper And what happens is People in this country Collect them And they fill them with things For people In Eastern Europe People Some people in Eastern Europe Are a lot, lot poorer And Guess what they had in them They had What do you clean your teeth with?

Toothbrush Toothbrush I had a toothbrush Okay So all I want for Christmas Is my two front teeth All I want for Christmas Is a toothbrush They have a toothbrush And Obviously toothpaste What do you put on Your Head To keep it warm?

A pack Yeah Like this Amazingly One of those Works doesn't it? This is Actually This is great Do you know What I mean Is it fits my head I have a very big head And I never get hats To fit my head And this one does So That's Remarkable It's great I had a hat I had a woolly hat And a toothbrush And things like that And a bar of soap And you would think Imagine if you got that On Christmas Most of you You open up Your Christmas present And there's a toothbrush You're going to find it Quite hard to go Oh thank you It's what I've always wanted It's like My son Is at The Edinburgh Theological Semites Where ministers Go out and train And They just produce A calendar And my daughter Is teasing me That that's what I'm going to get For my Christmas Just a calendar Of a theological college Yeah Right And these boys and girls You think when they Got that And they open These boxes And it's a toothbrush How do you think

They felt They were actually They were really happy You know why They were happy Because the things They go in Were very simple things That you and I Have all the time But they didn't have So they were really happy Because If you don't have A toothbrush It's great to have one And if you don't Have a woolly hat It's great to have one as well Now We give gifts at Christmas Why do we give gifts At Christmas Because it's not our birthday Who knows Yeah Because we remember Jesus being born It's really important And also It's the story Of the wise men Who came and brought gifts To Jesus And we're getting gifts So we're remembering Jesus being born And here's the thing About Christmas That's most important The best gift That you could possibly get Best gift by far Is Jesus And that's You think Well what does What does that mean And it just simply means That Jesus came He came to die for us He came to give us life He came So that we could go to heaven

[20:10] And when we come to know And believe And trust in Jesus That's the greatest gift That's what the Bible calls The greatest gift So please remember that Remember all the things you get Whether it's a Quad bike Or a magic kit Or a toothbrush Remember That they're just there To help us remember The greatest gift of all And that's Jesus himself That's what you learn About Sunday school That's what we're here In church for So let me just pray For you first Lord thank you For each of the children here Thank you for their homes Thank you For their health Thank you for All that you have granted To each child Thank you for the schools And the Sunday school And everything That is provided here We pray your blessing Upon them And upon their families And we ask This Christmas time That you would help Each of us To remember The greatest gift of all That you have granted The Lord Jesus Christ May your blessing Be upon us all In your name Amen

Thank you Nice to meet you I'll send you Probably after Sunday school Well we'll go back And grab a seat We're going to sing Mission Praise 493 O Come O Come Emmanuel It's a well known Christmas carol And after we've After sung this The children will leave For the Sunday school Let's stand and sing O Come O Come Emmanuel Now we're going to Read from God's word We'll read in Isaiah chapter 40 From the beginning To verse 17 Isaiah 40 Comfort Comfort my people Says your God Speak tenderly to Jerusalem And proclaim to her That her hard service Has been completed That her sin Has been paid for That she has received From the Lord's hand Double for all her sins A voice of one calling

In the desert Prepare the way For the Lord Make straight In the wilderness A highway For our God Every valley Shall be raised up Every mountain And hill Made low The rough ground Shall become level The rugged places A plain And the glory Of the Lord Will be revealed And all mankind Together will see it For the mouth Of the Lord Has spoken A voice says Cry out And I said What shall I cry All men Are like grass And all their glory Is like the flowers Of the field The grass withers And the flowers fall Because the breath Of the Lord Blows on them Surely the people Are grass The grass withers And the flowers fall But the word of our God Stands forever You who bring good tidings To Zion Go up on a high mountain You who bring good tidings To Jerusalem Lift up your voice With a shout Lift it up Do not be afraid

Say to the towns Of Judah Here is your God See the sovereign Lord Comes with power And his arm rules for him See his reward Is with him And his recompense Accompanies him He tends his flock Like a shepherd He gathers the lambs In his arms And carries them close To his heart He gently leads Those that have young Who has measured The waters In the hollow Of his hand Or who with the breadth Of his hand Marked off the heavens Who has held The dust of the earth In a basket Or weighed The mountains On the scales And the hills In a balance Who has understood The mind of the Lord Or instructed him As his counsellor Whom did the Lord Choose to enlighten him And who taught him The right way Who was it That taught him Knowledge Or showed him The path of understanding Surely The nations Are like A drop In a bucket They are regarded

As dust On the scales He weighs the islands As though they were Fine dust Lebanon Is not sufficient For altar fires Nor its animals Enough for burnt offerings Before him All the nations Are as nothing They are regarded By him As worthless And less Than nothing Amen This is the word Of the Lord Now we're going to have The Gaelic prayer And Donald John McSween Will lead us in there Good morning.

[25 : 28] My messenger Our you a, an ■■■■ ■■■■ ■■■■

With that country, women they fall weeks more than a year to ■ villagers prison from children.

They will be side with my head. They will spread their minds the language of their fallen children Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[28 : 35] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31 : 05] Thank you. Amen. We're going to sing the Gaelic Psalm 80 verses 1 to 2 will remain seated while we sing this.

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[33 : 47] Psalm 80 verses 1 to 2 will remain seated while we sing this. Psalm 80 verses 1 to 2 will remain seated while we sing this.

Let's turn to God's Word. Passage read Isaiah chapter 40. We'll look at the first five verses. As I came in, your minister said to me, don't worry about time.

He said quarter past one, half past one, it doesn't matter. I think he probably meant quarter past twelve because I'm not sure that even I am capable of speaking for an hour and a half.

So I don't think we'll go to quarter past one. But what are we actually doing here? We want guidance. We want God to speak to us.

And as we come to look at his Word, that is what he does. I think in the world today, people get very confused about how God speaks.

[34 : 58] A special revelation directly to us. People think, well, if only God would speak directly to me. If I had a dream or if there was someone here who was a prophet who would just stand up, then that would be so much different.

Other people perhaps look at it in a different way. They say, I really want to feel God. And if I don't feel it, if I don't feel him, then there's something missing.

And I think there is a problem there as well because our feelings can so often mislead us. There is a more sure and more certain word of prophecy.

And that is the Word of God for us today. And that's the privilege that we have in coming to that. Sinclair Ferguson says this in a wonderful book that he has called From the Mouth of God.

He quotes actually Professor John Murray. It needs to be stressed in this connection that the Word of God is relevant to every situation in which we are placed.

[36 : 02] And in one way or another bears upon every detail or circumstance of life. In other words, no matter who you are, no matter your circumstances, God's Word is relevant for you here today.

There is a mistake that many Christians make that they think the Word of God is back then and we need to apply it. We need to make it relevant. But the Word of God is relevant.

And what often happens in the church is we make it irrelevant. As we look at God's Word, this is God speaking to us. It's God speaking to our feelings.

It's not our feelings telling us about God, but God speaking to our feelings. God speaking to our hearts. God speaking to our minds. God speaking to our hearts.

God speaking to our hearts.

[37 : 56] hearts and lives of God's people. The Bible is not a book that is designed for you just to get information. It is God speaking to you directly here and now.

Can you imagine that? If people were aware of just how true that is. If someone really famous comes to your town.

And we had somebody last week in Dundee called Stumpy. I haven't a clue who Stumpy is. Stumpy is apparently really famous. Maybe some of the children know. He's an online character. And I thought, no one's going to go and hear this guy.

He's, what do you mean? And the care goal in Dundee, which holds 2,000, was completely packed out. It was incredible. People heard Stumpy is coming to town. And so they just all went.

Imagine, instead of that, the Queen is coming and someone really, really famous. People might go and hear. But what we're saying is every time we gather in worship, God is coming to speak to us through His Word.

[39 : 05] And that means there's a reverence and there's an awe. But there's also an excitement and an anticipation. So, as we come to this comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Let's just consider just a little bit of the situation. It's always good in the Bible to get the context. Otherwise, we don't understand it. This, we know the exact date this was written.

In chapter 30, 701 BC, when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Israel. Chapter 37 of Isaiah describes that.

We know that Isaiah was a prophet of the tribe of Judah, was married with two sons, and almost certainly was a relative of the kings. What Isaiah saw in the first 39 chapters of his book was this invasion.

And from verse, chapter 40, the second part of Isaiah, it describes the situation of God's people and points to a coming Messiah.

[40 : 14] He saw really dark days and experienced, actually, in Isaiah 40. It's very interesting because it begins to comfort my people, but it's in a situation where there were really dark days.

It's verses 1 to 11 of this chapter, which we won't look at it all, but it speaks of comfort and atonement, the way of the Lord, the glory of the Lord, the power of the word of God, the city of God, and the power and tenderness of Zion's saviour, shepherd.

And the rest of the book actually unpacks all of those themes. But it was a very dark place for God's people to be in.

And I find myself, as I look at this, and I've been studying this for a considerable time now, longing for that. There is a darkness in this world.

There is a darkness in Islam, I'm afraid. There is a darkness there that, when you look at what's happening, you can hardly believe the horrors that unfold on our news.

[41 : 21] There is a darkness in this world. There is the hopelessness of atheism. There is the emptiness of materialism. There is the brokenness of the church. The divisions within.

And the view that everyone does what seems right in their own eyes. So what does God say to us in that situation? I'm in a situation where I look a lot at what's happening in Scotland and the United Kingdom and how things are changing and how some things in some ways are getting better, but many things, particularly in a Christian context, are getting worse.

Scotland has secularised faster than any nation in history. Today, less than 1% of the population of Edinburgh will attend any church.

The decline has been phenomenal. And the opposition towards Christianity and the change, for example, in our education system is extraordinary.

And yet, we find ourselves in situations where the church as well seems to be under enormous attack and some of it from within.

[42 : 41] So what does God say to his people? First of all, comfort. Isaiah 66.13 says, As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you, and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.

Isaiah 12. In that day you will say, I will praise you, O Lord, although you are angry with me. Your anger has turned away, and you have comforted me. The circumstances of Isaiah's day required real comfort.

200,000 people had been deported out of Jerusalem. Many, many had been killed. If you are just imagining that situation, you are a small nation.

You are God's covenant people, God's chosen people. You are surrounded by your enemies, and then what happens? God doesn't answer your prayers. You are taken away.

And it is a devastating thing for you to experience. A man called Barry Webb says this, Isaiah's new message is for people whose whole world has been shattered.

[43 : 46] And for people like that, cheap comfort is not only a waste of time, it is cruel. Comfort that is not grounded in reality is not comfort at all. There is a kind of false comfort, isn't there?

Some of you will have experienced great sorrow in your lives. And imagine, for example, because I've been a minister for a considerable amount of time, I've experienced this in several different ways.

But a young couple who just lost their infant daughter. What do you say? What can you do to comfort?

Some Christians can be incredibly callous. They come along and say, well, it's all in God's plan. How's that comfort? How do we comfort people?

Sometimes people will comfort themselves by saying, well, things are not really as bad as they might think. So, for example, the situation in the church, people go, well, we had a really nice meeting the other day, or there's some really lovely people.

[44 : 47] And because of that, we refuse to see the bigger picture. Sometimes we really do just bury our head in the sand.

But the reality is we need comfort. Broken relationships, our own sin, the pain and consequences of brokenness in the home, in the church, at work, in personal life.

So how does God comfort, or how does he want Isaiah to comfort his people? Verse 2, speak tenderly to Jerusalem. And he uses a word there that's really interesting.

It's the idea of speaking to the heart. And there it's all our intellectual and emotional faculties. Sometimes people kind of mess this up a wee bit.

They think, well, what we need is we need preaching that's very emotional and that really gets to people. And, you know, it hit me right here. And they miss out the mind.

[45 : 47] And then there are other people, when they teach God's word, it's like it's a lecture. It's an academic lecture. They say, well, we don't want too much of that emotional stuff, especially if we're Scottish and so on.

We don't do that. I always find it quite interesting. I remember being in a house in Lewis at a house meeting. And we had worship in the English, first of all. And it was fine.

You know, there was nothing wrong with it. It was just fine. And then someone said, now we'll have it in the Gaelic. And I was a young man.

I'd never seen anything like it in my life, except at a Pentecostal meeting. It was just swaying and crying and singing. It was just incredible. And I thought, what struck me was this was language of the heart.

And I think sometimes in the Reformed tradition, we're so scared of emotions that we go the opposite way. And sometimes I think in other traditions, there are people who are so scared, or we don't want to be too intellectual, which is not really a danger for most of us, that they don't like anything that has any kind of depth.

[46 : 58] Well, what God does is he speaks to both. He speaks to our hearts. He speaks through the mind to our hearts. And here it's a question of reassurance, winning a person back.

Like Joseph to his brothers, Genesis 50, 21, where the same word is used. So then he says, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Words of refreshment and encouragement. Sometimes we might pray, Lord, speak to me, for I have fallen. It's fallen in the sense of a child falling over.

What does a father do? What does a mother do to the child that's fallen over? You run, you pick them up, and you comfort them. And that's the same idea that is used here.

Sometimes it is right, of course, that preachers and others point out the sin that we all experience. But it's wrong to do so without seeking to bring God's comfort.

[48 : 03] Not false comfort, but real comfort. We'll see what that is in a moment. But it may be that you are here, and actually you've spent a considerable amount of your time listening to the accuser telling you how bad you are, telling you how rotten you are, telling you how God is a God of mercy, but he could never be merciful to you.

And God comes and wants to comfort his people in the midst of sorrow, and in the midst of loss, and in the midst of great distress. And what is that comfort? You are my people, is what he's saying.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Comfort my people. Jeremiah 7, 23, I gave them this command, obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.

The point of that is this, that God has a covenant with his people, and he keeps that covenant with his people. He remembers Jerusalem.

They may have wandered far from him. Jerusalem itself may have been taken over, but they still have a father who loves them, and a home to go to.

[49 : 21] Deuteronomy 12, 11, Then to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. There you are to bring everything I command you, your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the Lord.

You are my people. This was true in the Old Testament. It is also true in the New Testament, though it shouldn't be true in the New Testament, because we've got much stronger teaching on this.

But the fact is that far too often, God's people can identify God or the church with a building. We still speak about going to church, and we mean the building.

But we don't find that in the New Testament. The people are the church. And that's why we meet in a hall here. And if you were to say, well, one day we'll meet in a proper church, I want to say, uh-uh, you failed.

Your theology was done. Because this is a proper church. Where God's people are, that's what the church is. The buildings are convenience. They're not the temple. We don't have Old Testament temple.

[50 : 29] And I remember one friend in the free church, because of the troubles that occurred around 2000, he and his congregation had to leave their building. And I think you rightly get attached to a building.

I love our building in St. Peter's. I'd hate to lose it. But it's a bit like your house and your family. Your house is not your family. If you lose your house, it's bricks and mortar.

You lose your children and your parents. That's a different matter. Well, in the same way, I remember him saying to me that when they moved out, they were really scared and they moved into a school and so on.

And he said, do you know what? It was like an enormous release. Because there was lots of things that we wouldn't have dared do that we could then do. And it seemed really strange. But he said that people especially came to realize that the church was the people.

And this is what God is saying to his people here. He said, you've lost Jerusalem, but you've not lost me. And he goes on to say, you have been forgiven.

[51 : 33] Tell her that her hard service has been completed and that her sin has been paid for. That she's received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. Now, there's a problem in the text here in that we're not sure in the Hebrew whether it's referring to you shall be forgiven or it's something that's, it's a kind of prophecy of the future or whether it's something that had been in the past.

And most people think that it's actually both. It talks about getting double, receiving the Lord's hand double for all her sins. That could refer to punishment like in Leviticus 26, 18.

If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.

Or in Revelation 18, verse 6. Give back to her as she has given. Pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. In Isaiah 61, 7 the same word is used instead of punishment for reward.

My people will receive a double portion and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance and so they will inherit a double portion in their land and everlasting joy will be theirs.

[52 : 57] Now, what have they done that they needed to be forgiven for? We talk here of her hard service has been completed. Service here is a military term or it's a term that could be used for serving in the temple.

And what Israel had done was they were meant to serve the Lord but they had failed and they needed forgiveness. And I want to suggest to you that that is true for us.

That we have been called to serve the living God. We've been given freedom to serve the living God. And in so many ways we in the church in Scotland have failed our Lord in that respect.

We have rebelled and we therefore need forgiveness. We need atonement. We need it to be paid for to satisfy all the requirements of a holy God. the point is that their sin and rebellion needed to be paid for.

How could that possibly be? Later on in Isaiah 53 we will find how that comes about through Jesus Christ.

[54 : 14] But this for me is just the most enormous thing to grasp. And if you're not a Christian it is something that is so wonderful that it's really hard to get hold of.

No matter what you have done no matter what you have said no matter what sin you have committed what lies you have told what blasphemies you have said what violence you have done no matter the hypocrisies and lies and twistedness and bitterness for years and years and years in your life if you come to Jesus it's all forgiven.

Sometimes we sing a song in St. Peter's Jesus paid it all all to him I own sin has left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow I think the greatest thing you could ever take when you leave a service of worship like this is the absolute certainty that Jesus has paid it all he's paid it all that's the great news of the Christian gospel we can go to anyone and say Jesus has paid it all you have been forgiven then we go on verses 3 and 5 it's not ending in fact it's only beginning and we could have your half past 1 or half past 2 or half past 3 sermon if you wanted because that would just get us to verse 11 but we are just going to go to verse 5 not only does God speak tenderly not only does he say you are my people not only does he say you have been forgiven but he says

I'm coming and you will see my glory and that a voice of one calling in the desert prepare the way for the Lord it's describing a great procession now in the desert or in the wilderness reminds us of the exodus but it's also a place of repentance and renewal it is not often that God renews his people in the midst of plenty it is often in the most difficult situations C.S. Lewis famous phrase that God whispers to us in our pleasures but shouts to us in our pains Hosea 2.14 therefore I'm going to allure her I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there I will give her back her vineyards and will make the valley of Acre a door of hope there she will sing as in the days of her youth as in the days she came out of Egypt now of course these verses are quoted in the New Testament of John the Baptist Matthew 3 in those days

John the Baptist came preaching in the desert of Judea and saying repent for the kingdom of heaven is near this is he who has spoken of through the prophet Isaiah a voice of one calling in the desert prepare the way for the Lord make straight paths for him sometimes you and I will find ourselves in a very dry place spiritually sometimes we'll find ourselves in the desert and God comes and says it's in the desert that he prepares to bring his king now they are to make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God they are to remove the obstacles in those days there were no properly maintained roads and when a king came to visit a herald was sent to announce beforehand repair the route it's a bit like I'm sure the queen's been to Tarba but I used to live in a place called Neg in Easter Ross and there's an oil rig yard there I remember one time the queen came to visit to open something a big huge crane or something and what amused me

[58 : 10] I lived on top of Nick Hill was seeing what they did to prepare for the queen coming they painted all the houses that were facing the road just one wall they didn't paste the ones in the garden it was just incredible they spruced up the whole road and they chopped down trees I just thought it was just unbelievable what they did because they were making a way for the queen to come I guess they wanted to to honour the queen well Isaiah is using that picture here and he's saying when a king comes you flatten you make a road you prepare you get rid of the obstacles and he's using that picture to talk about the barriers that come between us and God there needs to be a straight road a highway a raised road and the preparation there is just very simple John the Baptist makes it very clear it is repentant we repent Martin Luther sometimes

Christianity is presented in a form which says you're not a Christian you repent you believe in Jesus you become a Christian you carry on the reality is that's not true Luther said that the Christian in order to grow must repent daily it's not that you lose your salvation and then you gain it back again but each of us has every day to repent and you know I think it's wonderful that you can go to bed at night I don't know if you do this I keep a diary I write a diary and it's just for my own personal use it's not for anyone else to read if any of you find it and read it I'll just have to get rid of you but it's not for publication and sometimes you're looking over and you're trying to be honest with yourself and you're thinking I've got that wrong I shouldn't have said that I shouldn't have done that and then you repent and you know that Jesus has paid it all it's like every day you start with a clean slate

I think that's one of the most wonderful things about being a Christian and if you're a Christian and you're carrying around a whole load of guilt all the time I want to tell you that's actually a sin it's not humility that's a sin because you know what you're saying you're saying well Jesus paid it all but actually not mine the Jesus death on the cross wasn't good enough for me really what did you do that's stronger than Jesus death on the cross and if you believe that why do you not accept it and live it that's what I'm saying about how wonderful it is we need to repent remove the obstacles reveal the glory after the preparation the glory of the Lord will be revealed a highway for our gods what is the glory of gods well I think above all it's a consciousness of God's presence in which we see him to some degree in his holiness and in his beauty and that's why in any church service where God is truly present you won't be flippant of course you can be funny and laugh and rejoice and so on that's not a problem but you won't be flippant it's why when we come in encounter with the living God our first reaction is we want to fall on our knees

God is in his place and it is holy it is holy we want God's glory to be revealed when I read about the revival in Lewis and Harris and so on when I read Tom Glennie has books two marvellous books about revivals throughout Scotland one of the things that strikes me about every renewal and revival is that there is a sense of the glory and the awesomeness and the sheer holiness of God and we need that we need that because otherwise it just becomes our words it becomes trite it becomes just tradition it doesn't it becomes human manipulation but just that sense of the glory of God I don't know sometimes I've experienced this not as much as I would like but sometimes in church there have been moments I remember one time we were singing a particular psalm and just at the end of the verse there was just a stunned you know in a church of a couple hundred people there was just not a psalm not a psalm it was just and you knew that something and the presenter who's a young lad said to me afterwards

I I didn't know what to do I didn't know what to do and I said what you did was right you stopped and then we sang again because you were aware of the presence of God and that's what we need and that's what's been spoken of here God saying to his people not I'm going to protect you from all the trouble but in the midst of all the trouble I will be with you and I think this refers particularly to Christ this coming the one coming in the wilderness well we know that that refers to Jesus it's not as some Jews thought the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem it is the return of the king it's the way for God but the way of his people because we follow Christ we walk on that same road and it's something that is absolutely and totally certain the mouth of the Lord has spoken Isaiah 120 says this if you resist and rebel you'll be devoured by the sword for the mouth of the Lord has spoken Isaiah 58 14 then you will find your joy in the

[63 : 43] Lord and I will cause you to rise on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob the mouth of the Lord has spoken let me tell you what has been the absolute disaster in the church in Scotland across the board and let me say by the way that I think this began with the free church in the 19th century because in the 19th century the free church experienced tremendous blessing of course when we came into being 1843 and so on within a couple of decades we built 1500 churches and manses and schools and three theological colleges in Aberdeen Glasgow and Edinburgh it was just incredible it was enormous it was wonderful it was an incredible sign and you read a book like the annals of the disruption and it's just wonderful but then pride came in and complacency came in and being very comfortable came in and we sent students over to Germany because we were very academic and we were very smart and they came and learned there a new understanding of the

Bible and it was in the free church that there came into Scotland what's called the higher criticism view of the scriptures which although it continued to proclaim the doctrine of scriptures undermined the teaching of the Bible and then of course that permeated into other denominations and so the history of the church in Scotland overall in the 20th century now when all the various unions and reunions and things occurred in 1900 and 1927 and so on the free church much much smaller went back to its view of the Bible as the word of God there were those in the church of Scotland who held the Bible as the word of God though there were many who didn't there were those in the united free church who held to the Bible as the word of God but what happened overall in the church in Scotland is that there were many people who said yes yes we like the Bible but it contains the word of God it isn't the word of God and so the word of God became whatever the general assembly decided and what's happened in our nation is this and I'm not speaking about particular denomination

I'm talking about the church overall is that there are far too many Christians who have been taught that the Bible is not the word of God and we don't have that certainty the mouth of the Lord has spoken instead we get this is what I feel this is my opinion I'm coming right round back to where we started this is what the church says this is what the Holy Spirit is saying through general assemblies or individual prophets or whatever and we have to say no no God gave us his word so that we could be certain and sure now let me give you just an example of that and I hope this is not offensive to anybody I was in a house meeting in my father in law Bushin Red up in Stornoway and I didn't know I was so ignorant of Lewis traditions and customs and harvest and so on somebody was talking about McSween says this and

McSween says that famous minister McSween and I didn't realise what I was saying I said I don't care what McSween says what does the Bible say well there was kind of short ripples except there was a man there called I don't know his nickname actually Butcher Cook and Murdy Cook and he said I agree with my young brother it doesn't matter what McSween says now I didn't know at the time but he was a great devotee of this minister called McSween but he was being absolutely correct we can have ministers and teachers like Calvin and I quote Luther and for me people like Tim Keller and so on I look at them and go it's great the teaching that they give but if John Calvin or Augustine or McSween or Keller or whoever said something that was contrary to the word of God if you're minister said something that's contrary to the word of God if I say something that's contrary to the word of God you say no nice man good man knows much more than me but I'm sticking with what the word of God says the mouth of the

Lord has spoken see that's how you know that you are forgiven because God has said so how do you know Jesus paid it all not because you feel it in your heart because God has said so and let God be true in every man a liar if you cease to believe that that was the very first temptation wasn't it because the serpent came to Eve and the very first temptation was did God really say and then you'll notice what the devil did he misquoted what God had said he added to the word of God and that's why we need the battle in our day I think is to hold on to not just the inerrancy of scripture but the sufficiency of scripture we need the word of the Lord there is a famine in Scotland today of hearing the word of God I do not care what denomination it comes from but we need people to stand up and to say this is what God says and this is how we know what God says because this is what his word says what the word says God says so let me just summarize that and finish this is actually a message that does need to be shouted from the rooftops the gospel of

[69 : 25] Isaiah 40 is the gospel of Jesus Christ and we need prophets today we need people who are going to stand up I listened to a service recently on the BBC and it came from a church in Scotland and it makes paganism Brahminism contemporary readings with the word of God as though it was all the same the Bible does not actually have all that much to say about atheism the Bible has far more to say about idolatry and false worship and the message that we need to be able to say is this is what God says then remember this it's God's word that brings comfort if you take this book the Bible and take it away and rip it to pieces and do what Jefferson did he ripped out the pages all the bits he didn't like Augustine said if you believe in the Bible what you like and leave out what you don't like it's not the Bible you believe but yourself if you do that to the

Bible you know what you're doing it's not something that's kind you are taking away the comfort of the word of God from his people we need to acknowledge that we have sinned and we have failed in our service we need to rejoice that our sin has been paid in full and we need to know that the king is coming Jesus will return now I see that in two ways there's the ultimate in the second coming and the day of judgment and there's also this that the Lord returns in mercy to his church and grants blessing if you read Tom Lenny's works on revival in Scotland it's incredible how many times God has visited this nation and blessed and that's what surely we long for today but I leave you with this it is certain the mouth of the Lord has spoken there are so many things that you and I are uncertain about we doubt people around us sometimes we're worried about our culture we're concerned about what's happening in the wider world we have fears about the church where can we find certainty not the kind of certainty that turns you into fanatic but the kind of certainty that makes you more human more hopeful and more able to give as well as receive comfort I think that certainty is found in Christ and Christ comes to us through the scriptures so please whether you're scalpe whether you're in the church here in

Tarba where whatever church you're from if you are a Christian hold on to the word of God and proclaim the word of God and be assured that heaven and earth will pass away but God's word will not pass away I was thinking about that actually as I came over they call it the Clesham and it's pretty solid I like cycling and I was thinking how do I cycle up this one maybe I'll do it one day before I get too old it's pretty solid it's rock solid I don't like flying coming in a plane just on a way it's not rock solid that's not the way I would describe it but the Clesham is pretty solid and yet this word is more solid than the Clesham it's more sure it's more certain we stand on it we stand on it and may God bless all of us as we do that and if you're not a Christian you want to find out about Christ come to his word believe his word and commit your way to him amen may God bless his word to us let's just pray Lord we thank you for your word we ask your blessing to be upon it we thank you for your people here we are so often confused broken sinful messed up we look for certainty in a changing world we bless you that your word endures forever we bless you that

Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever and that we can come to you in full assurance of what you have done for us Lord grant us that each one and grant us your comfort in your name amen let's sing mission praise number 1164 come now found all every blessing and we'll stand to sing and please remain standing for the benediction now may the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep equip you with everything good for doing his will may you work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever amen