

# 31.7.22 am

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Date: 31 July 2022

Preacher: Duncan MacPherson

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning everybody and welcome to our morning service. A special welcome to visitors who are with us today. It's a real pleasure to have visitors throughout the summer.

And we pray for God's blessing upon you as you worship with us today. We have a summer Sunday school, which leaves after the second singing, so please feel free to send your kids to that. That's for all children of primary school age. The evening service tonight will be in Gaelic at 6 o'clock, led by Reverend Kenny Ferguson, and that will be followed by an English fellowship at 7.30.

The thing I just overlooked was there will be a cup of tea and coffee after the service in here, so please feel free to stay afterwards for a cuppa and a time of fellowship.

Something else that's not on the list as well is that the elders will meet for a prayer tomorrow night at 7pm. And then meetings through the week on Tuesday, there'll be the usual little fishes at 10 o'clock on Tuesday morning, and then Road to Recovery on Tuesday night at 7pm.

[ 1 : 10 ] Prayer meeting on Wednesday this week will be in person here, and via Zoom as usual, and the minister will be taking that service, because he'll be back from holiday by then.

Then the service is next Sunday. The notice says both will be taken by the minister, but he just sent me a text this morning to say that the morning service will actually be taken by Ian Morrison, who is well known to many of us here, as he will be up on holiday.

So morning service by Ian Morrison, and evening service by the minister. We also have an intimation about a book, remember the Sabbath day?

Is the Lord's Day still relevant in the 21st century? That's produced by Day One, and there are books available from the local branch of Day One and the Lord's Day Observance Society.

So if you would like a copy or copies of that book, there's a sign-up sheet in the porch there, and once we know how many copies people want, we'll order them and be sent down from Lewis.

[ 2 : 13 ] So they're £5 each. I haven't read that book, but I've read other books by Day One, and they're usually very good, easy to read, and very well presented in their format.

So I think these are all intimations. So let us worship God, and we will do so by singing verses from Psalm 33. Psalm 33, we shall sing verses 1 to 6.

We'll sing from the Scottish Psalter. I'll read first from the NIV, because some of the verses are slightly clearer. Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous.

It is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the Lord with the harp. Make music to him on the ten-string lyre. Sing to him a new song. Play skillfully and shout for joy.

For the word of the Lord is right and true. He is faithful in all he does. We will be thinking through the service today on the uprightness of God, his justice, and his faithfulness, amongst other things.

[ 3 : 16 ] So let us sing Psalm 33, verses 1 to 6, to God's praise. Psalm 33, we shall sing. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Be righteous in the Lord rejoice, it comely is unright, that a bright man with thankful voice, should praise the Lord of might.

Praise God with harp and unto him, sing with the psalterly.

Upon a ten-stringed instrument, make ye sweet melody.

A new song to him sing and play, with loud noise skillfully.

[ 4 : 49 ] For righteous God's word, whose word all his works are done in vanity.

To judgment and to righteousness, a love he heareth still.

The loving kindness of the Lord, the earth throughout doth fill.

The heavens by the word of God, did their beginning take, and by the breathing of his mouth, he all there boosted me.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord our God, we thank you that once again we come into your presence, knowing that you are the creator of all things, the mighty God in the heavens, who looks upon the earth, the creation that he has made.

[ 6 : 40 ] And Lord, we thank you that this morning we were able to see again the glory and the majesty of your creation as we came to meet together. We thank you, Lord, that after seeming weeks and months of cloud and rain, Lord, you have given us the great majesty of your creation once more.

And Lord, we thank you that that is a picture of yourself, of how so often, Lord, because of our sin, we cannot see you and your majesty properly. But Lord, when you send the light of your truth into our lives, it shines into our hearts and reveals the glory and the majesty of your character before us. And Lord, we bow down in worship that you are holy and just and pure and righteous. And Lord, we thank you that you are a forgiving God. And as we come today, we confess our sins.

Lord, we confess that we fall far short of your standards. We cannot keep your law. But we thank you, Lord, that Jesus has kept the law for us. And that as we come, we plead his name and his blood, which washes away all sins.

And Lord, we pray that you would purify us from all unrighteousness this day as we meet in worship to praise your name. Lord, we pray for those who are visiting with us today, that they might know your presence with them.

[ 8 : 13 ] They might know your blessing in this place. And we pray, Lord God, for our own people who are worshipping elsewhere, that they would find places where the gospel of Christ is preached.

And that, Lord, they would be encouraged and strengthened. We remember our minister and ask, Lord God, for your blessing upon him and his family. And pray that they would return this week refreshed and able to serve once again with all their might.

That, Lord, you might be honoured and praised in this community. We pray, Lord God, that your blessing will be upon your people wherever they meet today.

We thank you, Lord, that throughout our islands, congregations meet. We thank you, Lord, throughout Scotland and throughout the UK and throughout the world. People meet together regardless of their backgrounds, regardless of their ages.

And they come together because they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And, Lord, we pray that the name of Christ will go out into the world today. Lord, we know how hard it is for people to receive that truth.

[ 9 : 27 ] But, Lord, we know that your spirit is capable of overpowering the hardest of hearts and opening hearts to receive the truth.

And we pray that your blessing will be upon it. Lord, we remember the situation in Ukraine once again. We thank you, Lord God, that in the midst of war and strife, your people continue to serve you.

We pray for your blessing upon your church as it continues to preach the truth. We pray as pastors reach out to those in the front lines that, Lord, men on both sides would take account of the fact that their lives may be short.

And that, Lord, they need to be reconciled to you. We pray, Lord God, that you would bring that war to an end. And that, Lord, those who would set themselves up as almighty and powerful beyond measure would be brought to an understanding that you alone are God.

Father, we pray for the Middle East today where so many people remain bound by Islam. We pray, Father, that you would open their eyes to see that Christ is not merely a prophet, but that he is indeed the living God come in human form.

[ 10 : 51 ] And, Lord, we pray that you would open the eyes of many to see that. You would turn their hearts away from false things and to worship the living and the true God.

Father, we pray that you would be working in the hearts of young and old in our own community. Lord, it grieves us that so many have no interest in coming to worship you today.

We pray, Father, that you would remind them of what they learned in Sunday school, in school, and from their parents and family. And pray, Lord God, that you would be working to draw lost people to Christ.

Give us the grace to share your truth with our neighbors. Give us the wisdom to do it with love and compassion. And, Lord, we pray that you would be wonderful and merciful in saving many.

Lord, we remember those who serve in our own community, those who need assistance. We remember Harris House and Leiva Borough Care Home.

[11:58] And we pray, Lord God, that your blessing would be upon the staff and upon the residents there. We pray, Lord God, that they would be comfortable as they come to the end of life.

But we pray above all that as they approach death that, Lord, they would be able to say that they are reconciled to you. And that they know Christ as their Savior.

Lord, we pray for your presence to be with us now as we worship. Bless your truth to us here, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, boys and girls, if you'd like to come up to the front here.

That'll be great. If any visitors want to come as well, you're more than welcome. That's great.

Great to see you all here. We're thinking, amongst other things today, about God being faithful and the faithfulness of God.

[13:04] I wonder if any of you has a faithful friend. Have you got a faithful friend? Hmm. You're not sure if you've got a faithful friend, huh?

That doesn't say much for people in this community, does it? Have you ever heard of the term faithful friend? I'll tell you where you often hear about a faithful friend.

And you might say, oh look, Mr. So-and-so, he's out with his faithful friend. And his faithful friend isn't actually a friend of his, it's his dog.

They're going for a walk together. And have you thought why people call dogs man's faithful friend? Have a guess, Miriam. You're not sure? You're not sure? Oh, you're making life hard for me today. Yeah, Jake? Yeah, because the dog won't leave him.

[14:03] That's right, the dog won't leave him. Yeah, it sticks by your side. I remember I had a sheepdog who was very faithful. And if I was driving a tractor, she used to sit in the cab with me.

And there was one tractor that had a really rubbish cab and she would sit by the side of the field. But occasionally she would then come and she would look at the tractor and I would stop it and she would actually sit on the floor behind the clutch.

And it must have been the most uncomfortable position to be in, but she wanted to be there because she was my faithful friend. And that is a characteristic of faithful friends.

They always stick by you. And thinking about God as being faithful, I just want to tell you a wee story today about someone who the older ones here knew.

And the man's name was Bill Kenyon. And he was a presenter over in the Church of Scotland and an elder there. And we all used to remember Bill telling us a story which he liked to tell quite often, to tell us about the faithfulness of God.

[15:09] Now when he was growing up, he was living in Glasgow. And Glasgow isn't like Harris. It can be a bit rougher there at times. And he became a Christian when he was quite young. And he actually worked with some other people in a youth club in a difficult part of Glasgow.

And he used to do lots of activities with young people. And to teach them about Christ and to tell them the Gospel. But one of the big dangers in Glasgow back in the 50s and 60s was young men would go out at night time and get together in wee gangs.

And they would be spoiling for a fight with people. And if you met one of these gangs, you could be in real trouble. And one of the big problems was they would come and ask you who you supported. And if you said Rangers and they were Celtic supporters, or you said Celtic and they were Rangers supporters, you were in big trouble.

And anyway, this night Bill had been doing something in town. And he was walking up a close in Glasgow. And a close is a very narrow street. You can't get any cars up. You just walk up the close. And he was half way up when this gang started coming down the other end. And he thought, uh oh, could be a bit of a problem here. And one of the guys stopped him and said, Oh, who do you think you are?

[16:23] And Bill, you know, being quite a small guy, he didn't think anything great about himself. But he knew these guys were spoiling for a fight. And I think he prayed very briefly that God would help him in this situation.

And from the back of the group, one guy says, You can leave this guy. He's alright. And it was someone who had been in Bill's youth club.

And so he knew who Bill was. And he knew that Bill was a good guy. And they let him go. So he could have been in real trouble. But God had put one person in that group, even though they were spoiling for trouble and they were bad people.

He put one person in the group who could let Bill get away without getting hurt that night. And that showed the faithfulness of God to Bill.

Bill had been faithful to God in using the skills he'd given him to reach other young people for Christ. And there God protected Bill in that situation. So I'd encourage each and every one of you to remember that.

[17:26] And to ask God to be faithful to you as well. And to show his faithfulness to you. And you'll find it remarkable as you go through life how God is faithful.

So we'll say a short prayer. Lord our God, we thank you that you are the faithful God. We thank you that you are faithful to Bill. And we thank you that you are faithful to all who trust in your name.

We pray, Lord God, that you would enable us to believe in Christ. And to trust, Lord, in you to look after us all the days of our life. And Lord, may we never turn away from you.

But always rest in you and be faithful to you in return. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So before you go, we're going to sing a song about God's faithfulness.

Now this is a song that I think most people in the congregation don't know. Because we don't really sing it here. But it's one that I know and Angus knows. Which was very popular when we were students.

[18:29] And I suspect, I'm hoping quite a few of the visitors will know this one. Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock. His work is perfect and all his ways are just. A God of faithfulness and without injustice.

Good and upright is he. So I'm going to ask Angus to play this through once. And then once he's played it through, we'll all stand up and we'll sing together. Because our presenters don't know this.

But I think there will be enough of us that know it. And we can make a good and joyful noise. That's great. That's great. So whatever you want. Today's time is asymäl. Thank you so much.

So, güzel. And now I guess it will be as you are in. And now let's walk the■ of the world. I found it sounds. So that's how many people can learn. And while we ask me for that, we're in.

Thank you.

[19:50] Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock. His work is perfect and all His ways are just.

Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock. His work is perfect and all His ways are just.

A God of faithfulness and without injustice, good and upright is He.

A God of faithfulness and without injustice, good and upright is He.

Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock. His work is perfect and all His ways are just.

[20:57] Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock. His work is perfect and all His ways are just.

A God of faithfulness and without injustice, good and upright is He.

A God of faithfulness and without injustice, good and upright is He.

A God of faithfulness and without injustice, good and upright is He.

The words of that song are taken from Deuteronomy 32 and verse 4 which we'll touch on in the sermon later on. But if we can read now from the book of Ezekiel.

[22:15] Ezekiel in chapter 18. Ezekiel 18 and we shall read from the beginning.

The word of the Lord came to me. What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel? The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.

As surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me. The father as well as the son. Both alike belong to me.

The soul who sins is the one who will die. Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel.

He does not defile his neighbour's wife or lie with a woman during her period. He does not oppress anyone but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked.

[23:17] He does not lend at usury or take excessive interest. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between man and man. He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws.

That man is righteous. He will surely live, declares the sovereign Lord. Suppose he has a violent son who sheds blood or does any of these other things, though the father has done none of them.

He eats at the mountain shrines. He defiles his neighbour's wife. He oppresses the poor and needy. He commits robbery. He does not return what he took in pledge. He looks to the idols.

He does detestable things. He lends at usury and takes excessive interest. Will such a man live? He will not. Because he has done all these detestable things, he will surely be put to death and his blood will be on his own head.

But suppose this son has a son who sees all the things his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things. He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel.

[ 24 : 22 ] He does not defile his neighbour's wife. He does not oppress anyone or require a pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery, but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked.

He withholds his hand from sin and takes no usury or excessive interest. He keeps my laws and follows my decrees. He will not die for his father's sin.

He will surely live. But his father will die for his own sin, because he practised extortion, robbed his brother, and did what was wrong among his people. Yet you ask, why does the son not share the guilt of the father?

Since the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.

[ 25 : 22 ] But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed, and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live. He will not die.

None of the offences he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the sovereign Lord?

Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from the ways and live? But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness, and commits sin, and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live?

None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of, and because of the sins he has committed, he will die. Yet you say, the way of the Lord is not just.

Here, O house of Israel, is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous man turns from his righteousness, and commits sin, he will die for it.

[ 26 : 24 ] Because of the sin he has committed, he will die. But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is just and right, he will save his life. Because he considers all the offences he has committed, and turns away from them, he will surely live.

He will not die. Yet the house of Israel says, the ways of the Lord is not just. Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the sovereign Lord.

Repent, turn away from all your offences, then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed, and get a new heart, and a new spirit.

Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the sovereign Lord. Repent, and live. Amen.

May God bless this reading of his word. We shall sing once more, this time from Psalm 89. Psalm 89, we'll be singing in Gaelic.

[ 27 : 37 ] So I'll read verses in English first of all. Psalm 89, verses 1 and 2. I will sing of the Lord's great love forever.

With my mouth, I will make your faithfulness known, through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

You said I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to David my servant. I will establish your line forever, and make your throne firm through all generations.

A wonderful reference to the coming of Christ there. But we shall sing verses 1 and 2 in Gaelic, and we shall remain seated to sing. I will sing verses 1 and 2 in Gaelic.

I will sing verses 1 and 2 in Gaelic.

[ 29 : 22 ] And when you send Matthew to the Lord's nether and the Lord's lord were in the■ and babes and ethically NORM Rawls present to the Lord's will recognize, exhibition at on C of Bgress

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CONTINUES SONG CONTINUES SONG CONTINUES We will be looking back at the reading we were in earlier but the focus of our studies today will be in 1 John 1.

SONG CONTINUES I'll read a few verses from verse 5 through to verse 2 of chapter 2.

SONG CONTINUES SONG CONTINUES We have heard from him and declare to you, God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

[ 33 : 12 ] But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence. Jesus Christ, the righteous one, he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Amen. I want to look in particular at a few words in verse 9 here, where it's speaking about God himself.

And the words are, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. And in particular, I want to focus on these words, faithful and just and will forgive.

[ 34 : 33 ] I think as we come to these words and to God's word today, it's worth a while asking, what is our view of God?

What kind of an idea do we have of God? Many people will have various ideas. Probably the average person in the UK really doesn't give much thought to God, but will have a very general belief in Him and may well think of God as a forgiving God and have a general sense that, well, if there is a God out there, I ought to be okay because I haven't been too bad and therefore I will get to heaven when I die.

And that is a view of God that stresses very much His forgiveness, but doesn't really give any sense or idea of God being a just God. How does God deal with evil in those circumstances?

And how does God deal with all the failings that each of us has had? There are other people who have a very clear idea of God as being a just God. And they can think of God as being only too willing to punish Him for all their sins, all their mistakes, all their errors, without any hope of forgiveness whatsoever.

And people in that situation see God as somebody to be feared and not somebody to be loved. And then you'll have other people who will look at God's Word and will simply say, I can't believe that God is just at all.

[ 36 : 02 ] Look at the way He dealt with people in the Old Testament. And a God of judgment can't be a just God or a loving God. I suspect one of these views or something similar to it is held by many people here today.

But when we come to a verse like this, it challenges our preconceptions of who God is. Because for God to be faithful and just and a forgiving God, He must be a very special God indeed.

I remember when I was building a house, my own house, and I bought a book to guide me along the way by someone who's a professional.

And one of the key lessons in that is if you're looking to build a house or indeed any building, there are three things that you're actually trying to do. You're trying to build your house to as high a quality as possible, you want to build it as quickly as possible, and you want to build it as cheaply as possible.

Now the reality is if you want to build a house, you can't have all three of those things. You can have two out of the three. You can build your house to a high quality and you can build it cheaply, but it will take you a long time.

[ 37 : 17 ] You can build it to a high quality and quickly, but it will be really expensive because you will have to pay an awful lot of workmen to do the job extremely quickly. You can build it cheaply

and you can build it quickly, but you will not have good quality because you will be slapping everything up as quickly as you can.

It's impossible to have all three of those things together when you're doing a building project. And here we have three key characteristics of God that can appear on the surface to be near impossible to reconcile.

That God can be a faithful God, that he can be a just God, and that he can be a forgiving God. So I want to look at each of these elements in turn as we go through our study today.

So first of all, if we consider God as being a faithful God, the first question that probably comes into our minds is, okay, he's a faithful God, but faithful to what? Firstly, we can say that God is faithful to his own promises.

He has made a multitude of promises in Scripture, and each and every one of them has been or will be fulfilled. When the people of Israel were about to enter into the promised land, and Moses was speaking to them in Deuteronomy, he described God as being a faithful God, keeping his covenant of love.

[ 38 : 45 ] And he was thinking back to the covenant with Abraham, where God had promised Abraham that his descendants would indeed have this land. Now, they'd gone on a very circuitous journey to get there.

Abraham had dwelled briefly in the land, as had Isaac and Jacob, but then they'd spent 400 years in Egypt, and only now, as the people were getting to enter into the land.

But Moses was able to describe God as a faithful God, because here he was, keeping his covenant promise, and bringing them into that land. Prior to his covenant with Abraham, he'd made a covenant with Adam, and he had said to him, if you eat of this fruit, of this tree in the garden, you will surely die.

And Adam had rebelled against him and broken that covenant. And Adam had died. And everybody dies as a result of that.

So here we are, we're in a situation where we die and we have to think what happens beyond death. But what we have is a God who keeps his promises.

[ 39 : 55 ] He keeps his covenant promises, and he was faithful to Abraham, and he was faithful to Israel, and he is faithful to his people today. Secondly, he is faithful to his word.

David, writing in Psalm 33, as we sung earlier, said, the word of the Lord is righteous and true. He is faithful in all he does. So he is faithful, first of all, to his word, and then also in all his actions, because his actions spring from what he says in his word.

And he is faithful to his people. Those who trust in God can trust in him without having the need for any doubts whatsoever. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, was speaking to them about the trials they were going through.

And he said, and God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. God knows his people. He knows their limitations and he knows their weaknesses.

And he is faithful to his people. Paul described him in writing to the Thessalonians. He said, the one who calls you is faithful. God is a faithful God, faithful to his promises, to his word, and to his people.

[ 41 : 15 ] Secondly, he is a just God. And in some ways, I think this is the thing that people find most difficult to understand when we live in an unjust world.

How God can actually be a just God and allow so much injustice to take place. And indeed, when we think about it, the need for justice is extremely powerful.

people who are denied justice have no peace whatsoever. I think we can remember back to the Hillsborough Stadium disaster all these years ago where many people died in a crush.

But the thing that infuriated the relatives was the implication coming from the police that they had died because they'd drunk far too much and they were fighting amongst themselves.

and it was only when the public inquiry acquitted all those who had died and basically said they had, they were failed by the system and they were in no way responsible for their own deaths could the relatives find some measure of peace.

[ 42 : 25 ] Although equally, they were extremely unhappy when a court case trying to hold somebody guilty simply failed. they had that sense of justice being done for the ones they had lost in terms of recuperating their names but the sense of injustice remains because no one has ultimately beheld responsible for that disaster.

And the thing that struck me on the day of that, of the inquiry clearing the names of the dead was just how old and haggard some of the campaigners looked taken a great toll on their whole lives. Justice is something that is inbuilt into us and we have a great need for justice. Why is that? I would say it's simply because we are made in God's image and because God is just we are meant to be just and we have a desire to see justice done.

The problem of course for ordinary human beings is how do you act justly in an extremely complicated world? If we think of the challenges that politicians face I simply do not envy them. Today we have a measure of peace in Northern Ireland thanks to the peace process that took place more than 20 years ago now. But 2,000 people were murdered during the Troubles in Northern Ireland and we can be thankful that today the amount of violence there is just a fraction of what it was when I was growing up.

[ 44 : 06 ] But the politicians had to make some hard choices. In order to get peace between the different factions they had to let convicted murderers out of prison without serving the full sentence.

And the relatives of people most of them innocent who had been murdered by the IRA and by the loyalist paramilitaries were extremely unhappy about that.

Because for them it was unjust that these men were being freed. As a politician how do you balance these two things? The fact is it was impossible to have the peace process and to maintain that level of justice at the same time.

Is God in that kind of position? I think many people think that he treats some people justly and others unjustly. Lots of people will look back and say look at the stories in the Old Testament surely God is unjust for punishing whole nations there and God really shouldn't be punishing at all.

I think it was in a sense much more popular when I was younger just to think of God as not being a God who should have anything to do with punishment. But it's really interesting even today when God is condemned for being a God who has to deal with sin and who has to judge.

[ 45 : 33 ] If something really terrible happens people want the strongest form of justice. I've seen newspaper headlines from the tabloids typically.

If someone is convicted of particularly gruesome murder or murders, what do they say in the front page, this person should go to the deepest and darkest corner of hell and never be let out.

There is a recognition there of a level of punishment and of judgment ought to come upon truly wicked people and wicked things that is beyond the ability of us in our own society to deliver.

Why would we ask for that? And how do we get proper justice and judgment for all the crimes that go on in this world?

It's very important for people to be seen as being just and to act justly. Acting justly in a person's reputation are strongly linked. Legal processes are there to condemn people of crimes and to acquit them.

[ 46 : 44 ] And you'll hear of people leaving court having been acquitted saying now I can hold my head high because I've been acquitted. I've been found not guilty. And if they're found guilty their reputation is trashed.

If they're found not guilty their reputation is restored. It's incredibly important that a justly acting person maintains their reputation.

If we can have a quick look at verse Deuteronomy 32 and 4 which I mentioned earlier describes there a song of Moses and he's singing to God and he said he is the rock.

His works are perfect and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong. Upright and just is he. He uses that term upright alongside just.

God is upright. He is erect. He is vertical. He isn't bent. He isn't twisted. He's not crooked. And if he is going to be an upright God and a just God it means he must deliver justice perfectly.

[ 48 : 03 ] So there is a key element of recognition in Moses there of God's character and God's character leading to him acting justly.

The Bible gives various examples of God being recognised as acting justly. In 2 Chronicles 12 God sends a prophet to King Rehoboam who after securing the country and the loyalty of the people of Israel he turned away from worshipping God to worshipping false gods.

So God sent this prophet to him and to the leaders of Israel and said that he was going to send King Shishak after him who would raid the country and on hearing that word the king and the leaders of Israel simply said the Lord is just.

They recognised that they had been acting unjustly and that God was acting justly. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem after the exile he led the people there and rebuilding the walls. When the Levites were addressing the people in chapter 9 they were able to look back on the fact that for many hundreds of years they'd had foreign powers rampaging through their country until eventually they were swept off into exile to Babylon.

[ 49 : 27 ] While they were in Babylon that kingdom was conquered and the Medes and the Persians took over. But then the Medes and the Persians allowed them to return to Jerusalem.

And here they were back a decimated people in a ruined city and yet they could speak to one another and say in all that has happened to us you have been just.

Speaking of God and his justice. Does that sound just to you? I suspect for a few people here it maybe doesn't sound too just. That is God working out his justice.

God speaks to us and he says you say the way of the Lord is not just. Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?

Think of our modern society. It demands perfection. When I was young Christians used to be accused of being judgmental. But it amazes me just how judgmental modern society is.

[ 50 : 32 ] People can be in very high standing and one wrong word and they are out. Their reputation is trashed. On social media everybody gangs up against them and demands that they get sacked thrown out their job and no one wants to speak to them any longer.

They are a pariah and there is no hope of forgiveness whatsoever. So it is really interesting how having turned away from worshipping the living God people are now setting up their own absolute demands of justice and perfection within society.

If we look back at Ezekiel 18 we can consider some of the issues that Israel had with justice in Ezekiel's day.

And as we were reading earlier he imagines various different people and how they will be in relation to God. In verses 5 to 9 he talks about a righteous man who basically does what is right.

And he says there that he follows my decrees, faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous, he will surely live. Now I think most people today would be quite happy to agree with that.

[ 51 : 47 ] He then goes on to look at a second person and says but imagine this righteous man, he has a violent son and he does everything that his father didn't do, oppressing the poor and needy, robbing people, worshipping idols, lending a usury and basically a thoroughly evil character.

Ezekiel says will such a man live, he will not. Now the Jews and the Israelites would have said at that time, yeah we agree with that, that's not a problem, he's basically an evil man. He goes on in verses 14 to 17 to speak about the son of the evil man but the one who's now the grandson of the righteous man and he's saying what about him?

He actually looks at what his father does and he sees his father as a thoroughly reprehensible character so what he does is he goes back to acting the way his grandfather did so he doesn't go and worship idols, he doesn't oppress anyone, he gives food to the hungry, he gives them clothing, he doesn't take usury, he keeps all God's laws and God says he will not die, he will surely live.

Now that would have been a challenge for the people that Ezekiel was speaking to because they had this sense that that son ought to be punished for the sin of his father and it's something that's less so in our society today but historically again people's lives could have been ruined by finding out that their father or their mother had done something evil in the past and therefore they weren't considered worthy of having any proper place in society but God's saying no each person will be judged according to what they have done.

The term he uses is the soul who sins will die but then things get slightly more complicated and God goes on to speak about another couple of people.

[ 53 : 48 ] He speaks this time through the prophet Ezekiel about another wicked man who does all these wicked things that are terrible and says but what if he turns away from that and then he does good things at the end of his life?

Well he will live and in contrast he says what about someone who's been righteous and done all the right things but at the end of his life he actually turns aside from being righteous and acts wickedly and does all sorts of bad things and he says well what's going to happen to that one is he will surely die he will come under God's judgment.

Now again that challenged what the Jews had to think of at that time because for them they were about keeping the law and the more you kept the law the more righteous you were and so if

someone had spent most of his life breaking the law and doing evil things surely he wasn't worthy of entering into the kingdom of God.

But on the other hand if you kept God's law for most of your life and then turned away from it at the end is it really that just to then say that man must die because he's been wicked at the end but for 90% of his life he was actually acting righteously and I think that's a major problem for many people in our society today and indeed a major problem for many who are here who are in Christ who can look back and say yeah that's exactly what I thought when I was younger and if you were bad you ought to get punished if you were good you ought to get rewarded and there was really nothing in between but God's justice and God's judgment is something quite different and interestingly and I only noticed it as we were reading I overlooked it earlier when I was studying but at the end of verse 20 God says the righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him but the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him really key differences there the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them it's like a charge like an account that comes to them from the police here are the charges against you to stand in court but for the righteous man it's not a case of all the righteous things that you have done yeah we you know you get rewarded for but it says it will be credited to you going back to God speaking to Abraham it was described when

Abraham put his faith in God's word as and God credited it to Abraham as righteousness it was a gift of God it was nothing to do with Abraham himself but in terms of God's justice God talks about punishing sin he talks about punishing evil and but here in the heart of the Old Testament we have God also speaking to the people in grace therefore O house of Israel I will judge you each one according to his ways declares the sovereign Lord repent turn away from all your offenses then sin will not be your downfall rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit why will you die O house of Israel for I take no pleasure in the death of anyone declares the sovereign Lord repent and live God is saying yes I'm going to judge sin but he's also saying here's a way out of it come and repent and you will be free from sin so there we have that implicit implication there that God is going to forgive sin so that then leads us to the reasonable question of asking well if God is a forgiving God how can he be a forgiving

[ 57 : 37 ] God and forgive people for their sins if we remember from Deuteronomy 32 and 4 God is just God is upright how does God remain upright and forgive sin the writer in Ecclesiastes described a man this way he said God made mankind upright but men have gone in search of many schemes the Bible talks about men elsewhere has been crooked bent twisted full of sin and lawlessness and yet God is upright so how can God forgive and be upright at the same time in our reading in first John 2 there we are pointed quite clearly to it in John 2 and chapter 2 and verse 2 speaking of Christ it says Jesus Christ the righteous one he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours also but also for the sins of the whole world he is looking there at Christ paying the price for sin and bearing sin in the place of sinners and paying it so that God's justice would be fulfilled one of the ways in which the Bible thinks of sin is as a debt and now if any of us has debts we need to go and pay those to the person to whom we owe them the debt is effectively on a ledger and if anyone here has any knowledge of accountancy you will know you cannot hide money because it has to be somewhere in the accounts and if you steal money it will become obvious because the accounts don't balance and similarly with a debt to someone accrues a debt that debt must be paid now if a trader has a debt and it's not paid by an individual there's two choices they have firstly they can write it off and it's like that's I'm just never going to get that money and that's the money is lost to them because they've already paid for the goods and services they provided but it hasn't been returned the second thing that they can do is forgive that debt and they can actually say to the person I am not going to charge you for that I will bear the cost of that myself and if you if you'd simply written it off it's like bearing the loss but the debt still remains it's still there it's undealt with but if you forgive the guilt the debt you're actually saying you're taking it upon yourself and that is the way sin is sin creates this great debt with us before God and it must be dealt with in some way think back to when we're talking about people's reputations being injured and being justified in court God is the infinitely just

God whatever sense of justice we have comes from God and it is a reflection of just how just God is he is perfect in every way so therefore sin is an affront to his character it is lawlessness it is contrary to the way he wants us to live and it's an insult to him and it must be dealt with because if it's not dealt with his character is demeaned and diminished and there's this great heap of sin sitting in the ledger and every sin against an infinite God is an infinite crime so there's two ways that can be dealt

with firstly a finite being can pay for an infinite length of time to pay off that infinite debt or secondly an infinite being can pay for a short time for a finite length of time and pay that debt in its entirety and that's what we have when we hear about the reality of hell that is where people who have not had their debt paid go in order to pay for God's justice or to serve out God's justice but God has provided Christ for us to take away that sin because Christ

Jesus was not only man but God at the same time he was able on the cross to pay for the sins of everybody who would believe in him and if you trust in him today your sins are washed away that debt is completely erased and on the ledger you are seen as having no debt and you are just alongside God Ezekiel 18 and 20 the soul who sins is the one who will die it's really challenging that people absolutely hate the idea of hell and of people being in hell for eternity but if God is to be truly just and his name is to be vindicated he has to deal with that element of sin and he has provided a way so there is no excuse for anyone to complain about hell when they can go and trust in Christ and they have their own future guaranteed the last thing I want to speak about today is God as being a purifying God we have that in our verse he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness we have that also in verse 7 if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin the fact that we have it twice there within a couple of verses I think shows us the importance of this idea of purification some versions we talk about cleansing washing clean it's the same kind of an idea making pure purifying from sin and purifying from unrighteousness why do we need that is it not simply enough for God to forgive our sins and you know can you not just let us carry on you know sinning as we've always done and that because it's been dealt with well the reality is God's desire is that each of us enters his presence and we're going to be in the presence of this holy and this just and this faithful God it's truly remarkable to be saved from sin but it's even more so to be cleansed from it as well

God wants to make us like himself when God first revealed his covenant to Abraham back in Genesis 18 he links his covenant with what he's going to do in Abraham's life Genesis 18 and verse 19 he says for I have chosen him that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised for him and it's God bringing about for Abraham that promise of making him like himself and giving him the entry into the promised land for believers that entry into the promised land is entry into heaven itself and into God's presence and then God wants us to be just like himself because he can't stand sin he can't have it in his presence and therefore we need to be like himself in his presence the psalmist described

God in this way said the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones Jesus speaking in the sermon on the mount said blessed are the pure in heart there we have people being made just being made pure ready and fit to be in God's presence but there's a key condition to that and we have that in a verse and we had that in Ezekiel 18 and that is confession of sin if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness confession of sin in one sense is the easiest thing to do and in another it's the hardest thing to do this is all that God asks of people he says confess your sins believe in Christ and you will be saved but the problem for most of us is that sin is such a hold on us that and we don't want to repent we don't want to confess we won't confess that we're sinners to start with and we won't recognize that there's a problem of sin and and then even if we do we're very reluctant to want to confess because it's like you have to humble yourself before

[ 67 : 07 ] God and one of the effects of sin is pride and we live in a society where it's all about pride and about standing upright and showing how good you are but the reality is confession of sin repentance is a must but God promises us just these wonderful promises he's effectively saying to us repent and be forgiven repent and be just repent and be faithful repent and be pure and as he said to the Israelites in the days of Ezekiel repent and live may God give us the grace to repent to confess our sins so that we may indeed be like him and be faithful and just but have that forgiveness of sins in our own lives and to be purified from all unrighteousness let us pray

Laura God we thank you that you are indeed a just and a holy God we confess that we find it difficult to understand the way that you do deliver your justice and Lord there are things within us that rebel against what you would say but Lord we thank you that you have shown clearly on the cross that you have made a way to deal with the demands of your justice and at the same time to enable lost sinners like ourselves to come to you Lord we thank you that Christ is a wonderful

saviour we thank you that you were willing to pay the price in him and that Lord you have taken sin away Lord enable us each and every one to see the wonders of Christ and his work on the cross and enable us to have faith and trust in him and enable us Lord to persevere in our faith that we might walk in the ways of Christ all the days of our life in Jesus name whom we pray amen our final praise is mission praise 631 mission praise 631 tell out my soul tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord a number blessings give my spirit voice tender to me the promise of his word and God my saviour shall my heart rejoice verse 2 says his make known his might the deeds his arm has done his mercy sure from age to age his holy name the Lord the mighty one and wonderful words in this hymn so let's sing to God's praise the grace of the Lord a number blessings give my spirit me I will take you to Genesis which is a very good say the travies rhoi shall I hope the the highest all the planets all the literal operation of the spoken and theyard of my world a number blessings give my spirit

Blessings give my spirit voice. Tender to me the promise of His Word.

In God my Savior shall my heart rejoice. Like my soul, the greatness of His name.

Make known His might, the deeds of His arm. Has done His mercy sure.

[ 71 : 12 ] From age to age the same. His holy name, the Lord, the mighty One.

In God my soul, the greatness of His might. Powers and dominions lay their glory.

Glory by bright hearts and stubborn wills are put to fight. The hungry fed the humble lifted high.

Tell out my soul the glories of His Word. For it is His promise and His mercy sure.

Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord. To children's children and forevermore.

[ 72 : 29 ] May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.