

17.9.22 evening preparatory service

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Date: 17 September 2022

Preacher: Reverend Iain Macritchie

[0 : 00] For the privilege of coming into your presence, we thank you for the joy of the salvation that is offered to us in Jesus.

We thank you for all that we remember over this weekend that Jesus died so that we could have life that's eternal, so that we could have forgiveness of sin, so that we could have hope for time and hope for eternity.

We thank you, Lord, that you work in our lives, that you show us our sin, that you show us our need for a saviour. And we thank you, Father, for sending your son Jesus into this world to be our saviour.

And we pray that the eyes of all who are here tonight would be open to see why Jesus came into the world, that he came to seek and save sinners like all of us.

So we ask that there would be no eyes tonight that are blinded to the truth of the gospel. Open all the eyes in this place, we pray. We pray that there would be no hearts that are cluttered and minds that are distracted with things that are at ground level, that do not last.

[1 : 14] Help us to have our eyes and our minds and our hearts lifted to things above, that we would see Jesus, that we would trust Jesus, that we would know salvation in Jesus.

We thank you, Lord, for the opportunity and the challenge it is as we see the table that will be set tomorrow. We see the elements that will be out before us, these tokens, the bread that points to the body of Jesus, the blood that we see in the wine as it's poured out.

And we know that as we see this display, we are being asked to make our decision. Will we profess that our faith is in Jesus or will we remain at the distance from him?

And for any who might be wrestling with that question even now, we pray that for those who are yours, Lord, may they hear the clarity and the authority of the words of Jesus who says, do this in remembrance of me.

We thank you for Donald and we thank you for Rosalyn and for Jane coming forward this weekend and becoming part of the fellowship here. We thank you for Jane as she professes faith in Jesus for the first time.

[2 : 29] And we ask your blessing to be upon them and your blessing to be upon the congregation here and all the congregations that surround us here as well. As your word is preached, as your people gather around the table in different places, we ask that you would be present, Lord, and that you would bless.

We pray for Ian Murdo at this time especially. We ask, Lord, for your hand of healing upon him. We pray that as he is now home, that his strength would increase, that his mobility would increase, that he would be brought back to full health and strength and be enabled to continue to serve you.

And we pray your blessing upon Alison and Catherine and Ailey and Angus as well. That as a family, they would know your presence with them.

We ask now that you would be with Ian in a special way. Thank you for him and for speaking through him yesterday evening. And we pray again that tonight as he opens your word, as he reads it, as he preaches, that he would know the freedom, the liberty that comes from the work of your spirit in this place.

Help him, Lord, we pray. Help him to speak. Help us to listen and help us to respond in a way that glorifies you. And we pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake.

[3 : 45] Amen. Okay, Ian. I will swap seats for you. With great pleasure. Thank you, David.

Once again, it's lovely to be with you and we're so encouraged to hear folk joining the congregation. And we just pray that together we'll know God's blessing as we once again come around his word and hear his voice.

We're going to do so by reading now from the Gospel of Luke. Luke chapter 23. It's quite a lengthy chapter, so we're just going to read verses...

Read verse 1 to 43. Luke 23.

Let us hear the word of God. When the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate... Sorry, then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate.

[5 : 05] And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.

And Pilate asked him, Are you the king of the Jews? And he answered him, You have said so. Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, I find no guilt in this man.

But they were urgent, saying, He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee, even to this place.

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether this man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desire to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.

[6 : 12] So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by vehemently accusing him.

And Herod and his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate.

And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other. Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people and said to them, You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people.

And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us.

Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish him and release him.

But they all cried out together, Away with this man and release to us Barabbas, a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.

[7 : 31] Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus. But they kept shouting, Crucify him! Crucify him! A third time he said to them, Why?

What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him. But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified.

And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder for whom they asked.

But he delivered Jesus over to their will. And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene who was coming in from the country and laid on him the cross to carry it behind Jesus.

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them, Jesus said, Daughters of Jerusalem, Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

[8 : 41] For behold, the days are coming when they shall say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us and to the hills, Cover us.

For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death with him.

And when they came to the place that is called the skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on his right side, one on his right and one on his left.

And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, He saved others.

Let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one. The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

[9 : 50] There was also an inscription over him, This is the king of the Jews. One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, Are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us. But the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?

And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, Truly, I say to you, today, you will be with me in paradise. Amen. And we pray God's blessing on that reading of his own holy, inspired, and inerrant word. Well, friends, we're going to turn now to sing to God's praise before we come back to this chapter from Psalm 20.

[10:52] Psalm 20. This is the Scottish Psalter version of the Psalm at verse 5. In thy salvation we will joy in our God's name.

We will display our banners. Is that the... That is it. Yeah, okay. And the Lord thy prayers all fulfill. We'll sing down to the verse of Mark 9 to the praise of God standing to sing in thy salvation we will joy.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. In thy salvation we will joy In our God's name we will display our banners and the Lord Thy prayers are fulfilled Now know why God this King does save me from its holy hand We'll hear him with the saving strength by his or right and give In shyness some good confidence Some horses trust upon John But we remember Put him above the name And our John are When they are bowed down and forth, Deliver, Lord, and let the King Us hear when we do call.

Before we turn to this chapter together, we'll ask God's blessing on his word. Lord our God, we come and we acknowledge our need of you.

[13:50] That you are God, you're the one who is high and lifted up. You're King of kings and Lord of lords. And as we come around your word this evening hour, we come confessing that we need you.

Every hour we need you. And so as we seek to see what you are saying to us this evening, we pray for your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and our minds.

That we would be receptive to the voice of God. And that indeed we would be fed and nourished in our soul. And so be with us now we pray in Jesus name.

Amen. We're going to turn back just for a short time this evening to Luke chapter 23. And we're going to consider the section that we have from verse 32.

It's a count of the two criminals hanging on either side of Christ on Calvary's hill. And if we were to take a text, perhaps we could think of the words of verse 42 and 43.

[15:05] And he said, that is a criminal. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, truly I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise.

Well, last evening we were thinking for a short time what it is we are called to do.

To come and to eat. To feast of the blessings that the Lord has given to us by way of being able to profess his name publicly.

Tonight we're going to move on and we're going to think about why it is we do this. We can, as I alluded to last evening, do things so often and they just become a routine to us.

We forget why we're doing what we're doing. And so tonight on the eve of the Lord's Supper, we're going to ask why are we coming to the Lord's table at all?

[16:13] And what we have before us here in this account is a stark reminder. It's a reminder to us of the grace of God.

And don't we need reminded of the grace of God? We can look at scriptures such as this here before us, these narratives, and we can think they're straightforward stories that we know so well. But in brushing over these stories, we neglect the deeper message that is here within. The message that draws all of us here tonight.

That message that speaks of that salvation that is ours in Christ. And so tonight, for a short time, we're going to journey to Calvary's Hill.

We're going to come to the cross. And as we come to the cross, what we see here is a narrative that assures us and reminds us of that miraculous power of the grace of God in dealing with sinners like you and like me.

[17:20] A power that we see in action through the interaction that we have before us. An interaction that I'd like us just to think of under three headings. Rebellion, repentance, and reward.

Rebellion, repentance, and reward. And so here we are on Calvary's Hill. We have three crosses. We have two sinners.

We have one saviour. Two men who are worthy of such a punishment.

While one man is there as a substitute for many. A substitute for many, if not most of us in here tonight. Two men who aren't just petty thieves.

When we think about these two criminals, we might think that their sin isn't that great. That their crime isn't worthy of being put to death. But these were men who weren't just thieves.

[18 : 25] But these were men who were hardened criminals. So when they would go and rob someone of all their earthly goods, they would go further. They would go further and torture and even murder their victims.

They were on the level of Barabbas. Barabbas who had been released so that Christ, the innocent one, would be crucified.

Here we have two men then who are on that cross. On their own particular cross. Because of their sin. But even as they find themselves there, friends.

We see that the prospect of death itself, it doesn't seem to subdue them. It doesn't seem to keep them down. It doesn't seem to hold them back.

Because as these two men, as they fight for their lives. As they struggle with that last bit of energy that is theirs in this world. We see a window.

[19 : 27] We see a window into their hearts. In verse 39. One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him saying, Are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us. There is this criminal breathing his last. And what is he doing? He's bitterly and sarcastically accusing Jesus.

Are you not the Christ? If you are who you say you are, you save us. And you save yourself with us. Here we see their rebellion.

Here we see the ugliness of their sinful hearts. So that even in their final moments here in time, they are turning their back upon God.

And they are both at it. As we read this passage here, it might appear that only one of the criminals is in on the act, as it were. But both of them are at it. We see that in Matthew 27, verse 44.

[20 : 29] And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him. The robbers. The two of them. The two of them were there on either side of King Jesus crying out in their hearts, We will not have this man to reign over us.

They had nothing else to live for in this world. But still, we will not have this man to reign over us.

Isn't that solemn? Friend, I hope you're not here tonight in the final years of your life in this world.

The twilight years of your life in this world. And secretly, you might be here in this building, yes. But secretly, you're harboring this self-same thought. I will not have this man to rule over me, to reign over me.

I will not have this Jesus to sit upon the throne of my heart. It's solemn. It's real. But although this is an ugly scene to behold, we don't have time to go into this in any great depth.

But as much as it is an ugly scene to behold, one on either side of Jesus, one that isn't ugly far from it, is Jesus himself.

[21 : 48] He's ugly to look at. That is true. He's physically marred and scarred. He's battered and bruised within an inch of his life. That is true. But as Jesus hangs there, in between these two sinners, we see an unmeasured beauty.

A beauty that shows forth the fact that even for these mocking criminals, where there is life, and this is important, friends. Where there is life.

And this is why we need to be reminded at this time of communion. This is what we're all about.

This is what North Harrah's three churches all about. And every church in the land, where there is life, there is hope.

There is hope. Yes, there's mocking. There's blaspheming. That is true. But still. But still, the reality of the situation unfolds before them.

For one of these men at least. Not only does the reality of the situation dawn on him, but also the reality of the person of Christ beside him.

[23 : 00] So that's why this is a scene that is good for us to come to tonight. Reminding us why we are here. Why we are partaking of that wine that represents the shed blood.

The bread that represents the broken body. This is the reason. You are the reason if you are his tonight. Because what we have here is a picture of the matchless mercy of God in Christ.

A mercy that we see unfolding quite quickly here. This whole dynamic on Calvary's hill changes. Because two sinners and a saviour.

Just like that. They become a sinner. A saviour. And a seeking sinner. A seeking sinner. Which brings us to our second point.

Because although we see rebellion. We also see repentance. Repentance. There's a change. For one of these men. Something changes.

[24 : 06] Let's look at verses 40 to 41. But the other rebuked him saying, Do not fear God. Do you not fear God? Since you are under the same sentence of condemnation.

And we indeed justly. For we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong.

This man has done nothing wrong. What's happened here? What's changed? Well, two things have changed. Because firstly, in a complete change of direction.

Just like that. This ruthless rebel. He firstly acknowledges. And this is important. He acknowledges who Jesus is. But not only does he acknowledge who Jesus is.

But he acknowledges who he himself is. Do you not fear God? We are justly here. We're getting what we deserve.

[25 : 07] But this man has done nothing wrong. Now at this point, we could so easily become skeptical and say, Well, are we surprised at this man?

He's running out of options. He's here in the final moments of his life. Of course, he's going to turn to God as many do. Well, many don't. Many don't.

And not only that, but this isn't just an emergency prayer of remorse. That's not what this is.

Because there's a difference between repentance and remorse.

Remorseful people, they'll do all that they can to prevent themselves being found out. They'll deny and they'll deflect. But those who truly repent, what they do is this.

They own their sin and they view it in the light of who God is. And that's what this man is doing. Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?

[26 : 06] This man has done nothing wrong. We indeed justly. We are receiving the due reward of our deeds. Something's changed.

In a very short time, this man, he's come a very long way. But let's not be surprised, friends, because this is the power of the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is life-changing. That is why we're here. That is why we're remembering. The spirit of the Lord is life-changing. When I was in college, we were learning the original languages.

And another word for the Holy Spirit is pneuma. It's a wonderful word because it's so descriptive of the work of the spirit.

That's where we get the word pneumatic drill. We know what a pneumatic drill does. It breaks up rock. And that's what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit has the power to break through even the hardest of hearts.

[27 : 18] The Holy Spirit has the power to break through even your heart here tonight if you don't know Jesus as your Lord and as your Savior. That is the wonder of the gospel.

That is the liberating power of the gospel. That it's not dependent upon me or David or anyone else. It's his spirit. His spirit is able.

And we see that here on Calvary's hill. A power that not only has this man changed direction completely in terms of how he views himself and God, but a power that does more than that.

And this is where you and I come in. A power that leads this man to publicly confess and profess this reality.

He speaks these words in the hearing of everyone else around him. Picture this scene. Everyone is spitting on Jesus, mocking him, abusing him. This man has been in on the act.

[28 : 19] He's been embroiled in the spirit of the day. But now something changes. So that he raises his head, as it were, above the parapet.

He nails his color to the mast there in front of everyone. And he makes that stand. He makes that stand.

He publicly professes, even in his last moments on earth, that he is the Lord. It's not too late to profess to your friend. Don't think it's too late to profess just because you're in your 70s or 80s or 90s, even in this world.

And just because your mother or father, who you thought were godly, never professed themselves. Don't think that it's too late for you. You come to Scripture.

This is our example. The example that's here before us tonight. An example that shows this man publicly professing who he is and who God is, not caring about what anyone else around him thought.

[29 : 27] The crowd couldn't save him. The mob couldn't save him. The criminal on the other side of him couldn't save him. No one could save him but Jesus. And that's what's important.

That's what's central. That's what's crucial to our understanding of the gospel. Remember that, friend. Remember that. We see things moving very quickly because this repentant rebel, he also seeks relationship with Jesus.

Verse 42, and he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. He's acknowledging him as king. You're a king if you have a kingdom.

Remember me when you come into your kingdom. In other words, I don't want this to be the only time that I meet with you. I don't want this to be our only encounter one with another.

I want to be with you. I want to be with you for all eternity. I cannot bear the thought of being separated from you. Please remember me.

[30 : 34] Remember me. We only ask people to remember us if we hold them in high regard. Those whom we don't really care much about in this world, we won't ask them to remember us because we don't value their opinion.

But he values the opinion of his Savior. Please remember me. Remember me. Remember me. That is, of course, the desire of every Christian.

It's true that we know we don't walk as closely with Jesus as we would like. That is undoubtedly and undeniably true. Yet the reality is this, and this is a token for you tonight.

We want him to remember us. None of us in here tonight who are truly in Christ, we cannot imagine, no matter what else we have to forsake in this world, we cannot imagine a life lived separate from Christ.

Because even if we found ourselves meandering down these paths, and we have, they've been lonely. They've been times of darkness and discouragement.

[31 : 46] And so we want to come back, even when we find it difficult. And we find ourselves in our hearts saying, Remember me, Lord. Remember me. How does Jesus respond?

Well, again, just like we thought last evening of Jesus' response, this is what we want to do this weekend. We want to see Jesus. We see that his response is so different to our response.

We would have said, no doubt, I'm sorry you've had your chance. You've had your whole life in this world to follow me. You've had these last three years listening to my ministry, knowing all about me. And now at the very end, you've got the cheek to come and ask to be saved. Forget it. That's you and that's me. That's our natural response. That's not his response.

I heard someone saying just recently that the best way to reach people is through conversation rather than confrontation. Isn't that true?

[32 : 53] Even as Christians, we can be so combative, so confrontational. When we're trying to come alongside, I suppose we're frustrated and we almost want to shake people into the kingdom.

We can't do that. We're to come alongside. We're to show an interest. We're to converse, to speak with people. That's what Jesus is here doing.

That's what he's doing. Because when this repentant rebel makes this request, and this brings us very, very briefly to our final point.

I won't keep you too much longer. Instead of showing this man resistance, Jesus instead offers reward.

Truly, he says, Today, you will be with me in paradise. Isn't that a wonderful response?

[33 : 54] Where I'm going, you're going. There is no doubt. I will give you the desire of your heart. And that's what the Lord does to us. We can always say, Well, how can God send all these people to hell?

What kind of God is this? God is simply giving us the desires of our heart. If we don't want to live for God and with God in this world, why would we want to spend eternity with him?

And so he says, Okay, you have it your way. You don't want to spend time with me. You won't spend eternity with me. But where there's life, there's hope. So that even when time is short, and this isn't a cushion, but it is an encouragement, even when time is short, we can come and we can put our trust in him.

Where I'm going, you are going. Today, we are going to be in paradise together, never to part again. Isn't that something, friends? Paradise, of course, being heaven, the word here used for paradise is the word that's used for the Garden of Eden in places.

This is a Persian word, a word that refers to a walled garden. Of course, symbolically, no doubt, a garden that Persian kings, what they would do is they would invite companions to come into this beautiful walled garden with them, and they would walk with them through it.

[35 : 24] That's what paradise is. A place of inexpressible beauty and peace, true. A place where the lion and the lamb will lay down together, undoubtedly.

But most importantly, a place of companionship, where we will walk with Christ in that garden, whatever that looks like, we don't know.

Is it Eden renewed? We don't know. We can speculate, but what we know is this, that what makes this garden, this garden, what makes heaven, heaven, what makes paradise, paradise, is the fact that we are walking with Jesus in it.

We are spending eternity with him. And this is the paradise that this criminal is about to inherit.

Because he's worthy, well, of course, it's not because he's worthy.

Far from it, he couldn't be less worthy. The point is this, as he came to the end, he put his trust in the one who is worthy.

[36 : 34] That's why we're going to do this in remembrance of him. Not because we're worthy, because he's worthy. That, my friend, is the gospel.

You might be here tonight and you're not a Christian. What does this have to say to you? You might think, well, I'm too far gone in this life.

If only you knew what I did today, the thoughts that I had, the words that I spoke, you would see that I'm beyond redemption. I've heard it as a minister from people saying that.

I'm beyond it. And of course, we're all beyond it left to ourselves. But let's look at this here before us and let's remind ourselves that every single one of us, without exception, we are all criminals.

We might not be murderers, we might not be thieves, but we're rebels. We're criminals in the way that we murder God in our heart.

[37 : 40] We steal his glory from him and seek to take it to ourselves. We're all criminals by nature and that's why we need an advocate.

That's why we have an advocate. Jesus Christ the righteous, not only to represent us, but to take our punishment for us. And in taking our punishment for us, no matter who we are or what we've done, he can say authentically and genuinely, truly I say to you, you will be with me in paradise.

Why truly? Or verily, verily, or the other words that are used assuredly. Why does he use this word? Because it's unbelievable.

It's unbelievable. It's too good to be true. That is the scandal of grace. That is why we find it so hard to lay hold of by faith.

It makes no sense. We want to work our way up to God and he says no. Whether you are a criminal or a crofter or whoever you are, if you put your trust in me, you will be with me in paradise.

[39 : 03] So that's our hope tonight, friends. That's why we are joining together tomorrow. We are remembering the one who is going to remember us for all eternity.

Isn't that the very, very least we can do for him? There he is on that cross, dying a cursed death for us. And that's not the half of it, taking to himself the hell that should have been ours.

That is love. It's love as vast as the ocean. I will remember you, he says, but until then, you remember me until I come again.

More could be said, but time has gone. Let us join in prayer. Lord, our God, we give thanks for your grace and your mercy and your loving kindness. And we pray that indeed your Holy Spirit would apply this word that has been laid before our dear friends here this evening, that it would not return to you empty, but rather that it would achieve that which you please.

And we know that it pleases you to take men and women, boys and girls, from darkness to light, from death to life. Let it be so, we pray, even this evening, that one dear soul, even many more, would come to that place whereby they too can say, my Lord and my God.

[40 : 47] And if there are any here who are haltering between two opinions in terms of professing your name, they have fears, very real fears, as we did ourselves.

We pray that you would be with them and help them to take that step of faith and the knowledge that you are the God who will deal with those fears in your time, that you are the God who will give

to our dear, uncertain friends the strength that they need to take that next step.
And so part us now with your blessing. Be with us in the fellowship that is to follow the service,
bless the food we're going to enjoy one with another and forgive us for Christ's sake.
Amen. We're going to conclude singing now to God's praise from Psalm 23. Psalm 23, the sing
Psalms version.

The Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know. He makes me lie down where the green pastures
grow. He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow.

[41 : 54] We'll sing the whole psalm to the praise of God, standing to sing. the Lord is my
shepherd, no want shall I know.

He makes me lie down where the green pastures grow. He leads me to rest where the calm waters
flow.

He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow. My wandering steps He brings back to His way in
straight paths of righteousness making me stay.

And this He has done His great name to display. His great name to display.

Though I walk in death's valley where darkness is near, because you are with me no evil I'll fear.

[43 : 31] Your rod and your staff bring me comfort and cheer. Your rod and your staff bring me
comfort and cheer.

In the sight of my enemies a table you spread The oil of rejoicing you pour on my head My cup
overflows and I'm graciously fed My cup overflows and I'm graciously fed So surely your covenant
mercy and grace Will follow me closely In all of my ways I will dwell in the house of the Lord all my
days I will dwell in the house of the Lord all my days

We'll conclude with a benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the
Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with you now and forevermore.
Amen.