

1.1.23 pm

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Preacher: Duncan MacPherson

[0 : 00] Good evening everyone and welcome to our evening service. Welcome to people who are listening and watching online. A couple of announcements just to pick out the prayer meeting as usual on Wednesday.

Encourage as many people as possible to attend that. That would be great. And also we have envelopes available for folk to pick up. There's some still on the table there.

So if you had to pick up yours please collect them. And anyone who's looking to get envelopes if you speak to David Cameron or to one of the other elders will arrange for you to get envelopes for this coming year.

So these are all the intimations. Cammie was admiring my jacket on the way in the door and I wore it in order to stay warm in the car. And when I turned round I found I'd forgotten my preaching jacket.

So I'll wear this for a little time. Until I'm very warm and then I'll take it off for preaching. So let us worship God.

[1 : 07] Let us sing to his praise. Verses from Psalm 122. We shall sing in Gaelic. I shall read verses from the New International Version.

Psalm 122. Psalm 122. I will lift up. I rejoice with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up. The tribes of the Lord to praise the name of the Lord.

According to the statute given to Israel. So we shall sing the first two stanzas in Gaelic. Psalm 122. Verses 1 to 4. A great song of ascents as it's called this psalm.

Let us sing to God's praise. Let us sing to God's praise.

[2 : 31] God's praise. Let us sing to God's praise.

God's praise. Let us sing to God's praise.

God's praise. God's praise.

God's praise. Thank you.

Thank you.

[4 : 53] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. We shall now sing to God's praise from Mission Praise and hymn number 575.

[8 : 05] 575, rejoice, the Lord is King, your Lord and King adore. Mortals give thanks and sing and triumph evermore.

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice, rejoice. Again I say, rejoice. Let's sing the whole of this hymn to God's praise. Lift up your heart, lift up your voice, rejoice.

Again I say, rejoice. Jesus the Savior is the God of truth and love.

When He had purged our stairs, He took His seat above. Lift up your heart, lift up your voice, rejoice.

Again I say, rejoice. His kingdom cannot fail.

[9 : 44] He rules o'er earth and heaven. The keys of death and hell are to our Jesus' give.

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice, rejoice. Again I say, rejoice.

He sits at God's right hand, till all His force submit. And bow to His command and fall beneath His feet.

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice. Rejoice again I say, rejoice.

Rejoice in glorious hope. Jesus the Lord, Jesus the judge shall come. And take His servants up to their eternal home.

[11 : 05] Lift up your heart, lift up your voice. Rejoice again I say, rejoice.

Rejoice. Now we will read tonight from the Gospel according to John.

And we shall start partway through chapter 7. Chapter 7 and from verse 37. The beginning of the chapter tells us that the time is the Feast of Tabernacles.

And so Jesus is up at the feast. So reading from verse 37 of John chapter 7. On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

[12 : 24] Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. On hearing his words, some of the people said, surely this man is the prophet. Others said, he is the Christ.

Still others asked, how can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?

Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him. Finally, the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who asked them, Why didn't you bring him in?

No one ever spoke the way this man does, the guards declared. You mean he has deceived you also, the Pharisees retorted. Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?

No, but this mob that knows nothing of the law, there is a curse on them. Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, Does a law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?

[13 : 33] They replied, Are you from Galilee too? Look into it and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee. Then each went to his own home.

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts where all the people gathered round him, and he sat down to teach them.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say? They were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.

[14 : 32] Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this those who heard began to go away one at a time. The older ones first until only Jesus was left with the woman still standing there.

Jesus straightened up and asked her, Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? No one, sir, she said. Then neither do I condemn you, Jesus declared.

Go now and leave your life of sin. Amen. And may God add his blessing to this reading of his word. We shall sing now from Psalm 130.

Psalm 130 in the Scottish Psalter. And we shall sing the whole psalm. Psalm 130.

Psalm 130. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear. Unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear. Down to the last verse.

[15 : 44] And plenteous redemption is ever found with him. And from all his iniquities he, Israel, shall redeem. A great psalm of crying out to the Lord and of receiving his forgiveness.

Let's sing this whole psalm to God's praise. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear.

Unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear.

Lord, who shall stand if thou, O Lord, should smirk iniquity.

But yet with thee, forgiveness is the fear that fear thou mayest be.

[17 : 14] I wait for God, my soul doth wait. My hope is in his word.

More than they lack for mourning watch, my soul is for the Lord.

I say, Lord, I lay not to watch, the mourning light to see.

Let Israel open the Lord.

For when in mercy be. Unplenteous redemption is ever found with him.

[18 : 38] And from all his iniquities he Israel shall redeem.

Let's pray again as we come back to God's word. Lord, our Father, we thank you that the psalmist could recognize that your word was truth.

We thank you that it remains truth to this day. And we thank you, Lord, that your word and your truth will stand forever. We pray, Father, that wherever people meet tonight around your word, that, Lord, you would give them a blessing from it.

That your spirit would open hearts and would open eyes and minds to see the truth that is there.

And, Lord, may hearts receive it. We pray for ourselves here.

That, Lord, you would enable us to understand your word, to rejoice in it and to respond to it in repentance and in faith. And, Lord, above all, in worship of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

[19 : 58] Amen. Amen. So we have here in this reading from verse 37, Jesus teaching the people in the temple at the time of the festival.

For context, if we look right back to the beginning of chapter 7 and verse 1, we can see that Jesus stayed away from Judea because the Jews there were plotting to take his life.

And he went up to the feast later than the others because he knew that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees really wanted him dead.

The feast that he was at was the feast of tabernacles. And if you want to learn more of that, that's found in Leviticus 23 and verses 37 to 44.

But it was one of the feasts that was given by the Lord to the Jews. It was to be observed for a period of seven days at the end of the harvest, after they gathered the harvest in.

[21 : 10] And the people there were to take branches and build themselves small huts or booths to live in for that week to remind themselves of the deliverance of the Lord from the hand of the Egyptians.

So this was a really important feast for the Jews. And it was a joyous one. And the people were expressly commanded in Leviticus 23 that they should be joyful at this feast because they were remembering the Lord's deliverance for them.

And what we have here in verse 37, where I started my reading, is Jesus preaching on the last day of the feast. And in verse 37, he says, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from him. So we have there Jesus being very forthright and very clear to the people at the end of this period of feasting.

So reaching its climax and telling them that really they should be drinking of him and they should be believing in him. And if they believe in him, these rivers, these streams of living water will flow from within him, within them.

[22 : 33] And this, not surprisingly, caused a division among the people who are listening. So this is the kind of background to the situation that Jesus was in. And as we move into chapter 8, we see Jesus back again the day after the feast was over.

So we can tell the feast was to last for seven days and it started on a Sabbath day. So the seven days had now passed and it was the eighth day.

So Jesus was actually in the temple courts. People were gathered around him. He'd sat down to teach them on the Sabbath day, on the Lord's day. So in effect, they were at worship.

And we see in verse 3 of chapter 8, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, they bring a woman who was caught in the act of adultery.

And they make her stand before Jesus and before Jesus' whole audience in order to challenge Jesus and to try and trap him. And in this situation, we can learn an awful lot about the nature of sin and Jesus' actual response to it.

[23 : 49] And we have here a real challenge laid down before Jesus to see how he would respond to sin. But a key element in all of this as well and fundamental element is Jesus wants to know how each person who is there is going to respond to sin.

Both the woman caught in adultery and also her accusers who brought her into the situation. And by placing her in the midst of that situation, these teachers and Pharisees really had no concern for herself.

It was all about trying to trap Jesus. And they placed her in a humiliating position. And first of all, as we look at these verses, I just want to think through the deceitfulness of sin that is on display here. In many ways, we can look at the situation the woman finds herself in. And the deceitfulness of sin is quite obvious. There was a great attraction to her and the prospect of great pleasure in sin.

But as soon as she was caught in sin, all of that will have disappeared. And she now has to deal with the consequences. She's publicly humiliated. She's brought into the temple in front of Jesus.

[25 : 12] And she's surrounded by these scribes and Pharisees. And they're asking this question about the law, saying the law demands that this woman be stoned to death.

What do you say, Jesus? Jesus. Now, the poor woman will obviously have been quite terrified in this situation at the thought of the consequence of her sin could very likely, in that instance, bring about her death.

It must have been really horrifying. And that is very much the nature and the deceitfulness of sin. Prior to it, it is so attractive. But after sin is found out, it is something so reprehensible and horrible to look back on, to think of what we have done.

But she's not the only one here who is being deceived by sin. We also have her accusers standing before her and before Jesus.

And as we read earlier on in the chapter, they were really quite keen to see, to apprehend Jesus and see that they could actually put him to death, even at this time.

[26 : 23] And so really, within their own hearts, these Pharisees were actually murderers because they had that desire in their heart to put Jesus to death. More than that, they were also self-righteous people because they were self-righteous with regards to the woman herself.

They looked down on her sin as being worthy of judgment. But there was no sense in their own hearts of the fact that they should be judged for their own sins. They looked down on everybody else around them as being sinners as well and not worthy of any kind of respect.

Verse 49 of chapter 7, what do they say about the general people? No, but this mob that knows nothing of the law. That was their concept of these people who were listening avidly to what Jesus had to say when he was teaching them from God's word.

And by they just looked down on them as a mob and not worthy of respect. And their opinion had no value in the eyes of the Pharisees.

We know from elsewhere in the Gospels, from Mark chapter 7 and verse 11, that they didn't honour their parents. Jesus challenged them about how they would say, well, if I was going to give a gift to my parents, but instead I give it to the Lord, and this gift would be called Corban.

[27 : 47] Then they no longer had to honour their parents with that gift. And he pointed out the hypocrisy of that situation. So they were failing to keep the law themselves and honouring their parents properly.

And beyond that, they were hating their own neighbours. Again, in verse 49 of chapter 7, they described the people as a mob and then said there is a curse on them.

That's quite something for them to say that there is a curse upon the people when they had no good reason to denounce them in that way. And really what that was showing was that within their hearts they hated their neighbour.

They had no concern for the salvation of their neighbour, whether that was the generality of people, or whether that was this poor woman that they had brought before Jesus at this point.

So we have both the accusers and the accused being deceived by sin. And they come up against Jesus and they have to deal with that and face the consequences of it in this situation.

[28 : 57] The big difference between the two groups, of course, is that the woman, having been caught in her sin and dragged into public and knowing what the law says about it, that she can see that sin has deceived her, whereas her accusers are blind to the situation and the state that they are in.

But her accusers appeal to the law and they say to Jesus in verse 5 of chapter 8, In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women.

Now what do you say? What do you say? They're laying out this challenge to Jesus. So we can move on from that to thinking about the reality of sin and how Jesus sees it.

And as we read these verses, it would be natural to think of Jesus in a real bind here. Because if he agrees that the law condemns the woman, then he ought to say to them, Yes, she's condemned. Take her out and stone her. The challenge with that, of course, is that that would be contrary to Roman law at the time. If you remember when Jesus himself was crucified, these same teachers had to go to Pilate and say, We don't have the power to put a man to death.

[30 : 16] It's you that has to do that. And if Jesus did condemn the woman, perhaps his teaching would lose authority in the eyes of the ordinary people who were listening to every word he had to say and hanging on his words.

And the other option was for Jesus to say, No, she should not be condemned by the law. He would disagree with the law itself. And if he said that, then he himself would be condemned by the Sanhedrin as having set aside God's law and not doing what God had and therefore saying that he cannot be a prophet if he is acting contrary to the law of God.

A great challenge for Jesus. So what does he do? We see scripture telling us that he basically bent forward and looked down at the ground and he started writing in the ground itself.

There's lots of speculation about what Jesus wrote and the very fact that we don't have the words tells us that it's not important that we should know what Jesus had actually written down in the ground.

But I can think of a couple of reasons why Jesus was doing that. First, I suspect because Jesus was fully human, the very fact that he had been teaching the people on the Lord's Day and was in an act of worship when these teachers and Pharisees came in and basically barged in and demanded that he address the situation, I suspect that he was truly shocked that the religious people of the day would even think of doing such a thing when he, of all people, was leading worship and teaching the people from the word of God that they would think they had the right to come in and disrupt that worship.

[32 : 12] Secondly, I think he's doing that deliberately to draw attention away from the woman herself and onto himself because he could see that while she indeed was a sinner and she would have to be dealt with and as we'll see, he does deal with her, yet the way that the scribes and the Pharisees were doing this was completely wrong.

They were seeking to humiliate her and hopefully humiliate himself at the same time. So he draws his focus onto himself by writing in the ground and he must have done that for some time because verse 7 says when they kept on questioning him, he straightened up.

So they were questioning him for some time and he would obviously gather his thoughts together, draw the attention of the people away from that woman and have their attention focused solely on him so that when he did speak, everybody would be listening.

I find it very interesting that he said he straightened up in order to speak. Scripture speaks so much about righteous men being upright and not having devious manners and being scheming and I think that you have this picture there of the righteousness of Christ as Jesus stands upright and he speaks to them and he says, if any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her. He speaks, he says his word. You can just imagine those words coming out of his mouth and the shocked response of those who are hearing them.

[33 : 56] The fundamental thing that Jesus does here is he takes the focus away from an individual's sin and puts it onto sin in general.

We're so apt to focus on individual sins rather than to think about sin as being that state of being that everybody is in when in rebellion against God.

It is our state by nature and people don't like to hear that and these teachers here did not like to hear that but that was the reality and when Jesus said, if any of you has not sinned, let him be the first one to cast the stone, he knew that that was going to speak to every individual conscience to tell each and every person that yes, you are a sinner.

There's no exemption for you from this situation. So he spoke that single sentence and then it says, he stooped down again and wrote on the ground.

You just imagine the crowd that had been listening to Jesus teaching, looking at Jesus, stooping back down on the ground and then looking at these scribes and Pharisees, these teachers of the law who should have known so much better than to break into Jesus at his work and at his teaching and we see the outcome of it.

[35 : 25] Those who heard began to go away one at a time, first the elderly ones, the older ones, until only Jesus was left. It's really fascinating just seeing the response that these people have to

Jesus.

Undoubtedly, each of them recognized that they had sinned, that they were indeed sinners. But the question comes to mind, was it that conviction of guilt and repentance for sin that caused them to walk away?

Or was it simply the fact that Jesus had given them an answer that they could not respond to themselves, that they had been humiliated rather than that they had managed to humiliate him? My own thought is that it's almost certainly the latter case. Because if someone wants to repent or has that sense of repentance in their own hearts when faced by the word of God and the word of Jesus, the one place they want to go is to Jesus to have that taken away.

But here, they couldn't get away from Jesus quickly enough. Each of them went away recognizing their sin, but none of them, at that time anyway, was willing to do anything about it.

[36 : 49] It's really fascinating that we don't hear of anyone saying anything to Jesus in response to this. We read at the end of chapter 7 when the guards came back from having been asked to apprehend him and they were questioned by the priests and the Pharisees, why didn't you bring him in?

No one ever spoke the way this man does, the guards declared. And here we have Jesus speaking to the same group of people, this thing, speaking directly to them and they, and they're in their hearts, will have had to admit the same thing.

No one ever spoke the way that Jesus does. They had accused Jesus of deceiving the guards, but when their turn came to listen to Jesus, they didn't have a word in response either.

It's amazing how the word of Jesus leaves men silent. The word of God can leave men silent when it goes straight into their hearts.

I may have said this before, it's a story I remember hearing some time ago when it was of a young Jewish man in relatively recent times that started reading the Bible.

[38 : 07] And he was amazed at the wisdom that Jesus had and he got to this story. And when he threw out that question, when the Pharisees threw out the question to Jesus saying, now what do you say?

He shut his Bible and he thought, how can Jesus respond to this? He simply could not think of any way that Jesus could get out of this situation.

And when he opened his Bible again and read Jesus' response, he concluded there and then that Jesus must be the Son of God. Because the wisdom and the power that was in that response was such as to convince him that this was no ordinary man that we were talking about in this situation.

And this truly is one of the most remarkable stories we have in Scripture of Jesus outwardly looking as though he's merely a teacher, merely a man, but yet from his word revealing to us that he is in fact God as well as he speaks with the authority that comes from God alone.

So while his accusers were gradually drifting away, Jesus himself stooped down and he wrote on the ground.

[39 : 27] And you can just imagine all his accusers looking at him as first the oldest ones go and then the younger ones think, yeah, I better go as well. And again, we don't know what Jesus wrote in the ground, but I think for me symbolically, the very fact that Jesus was writing in the dust was just reminding each and everyone there that day that we came from the dust and to dust we must return.

And he was saying to them and reminding them through his words that it was their sin and the sin of Adam that was causing them, that would cause each and every one to return to the dust in due course.

So what we have then is the self-righteous, those who thought they were right while that woman was the sinner and were wrong leaving Jesus' presence.

And the woman herself was left with Jesus. As I was writing this, I thought to myself of the response that Job gave when he heard God speak.

Here we have a man who is described as upright and who had suffered terribly and had said, could not understand and complain to all his friends about what God was doing to him. But when Job replied to the Lord, he was effectively silenced by the word of the Lord and in responding to God himself, he said, You said, Listen now and I will speak.

[41 : 00] I will question you and you shall answer me. And Job goes on to say, My eyes had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

He was a man who had suffered terribly and who had questioned God's goodness towards him. And yet when he came face to face with God himself, he could simply say, I repent in dust and ashes.

And yet these teachers of the law, these Pharisees, they had left Jesus' presence. So the only person who was left there was the one who they considered to be the sinner, the woman who was caught in adultery.

That's the reality of sin working in people's lives. And we see a sifting there between those who would accept Jesus' word and those who wouldn't.

And we see Jesus addresses the woman now that her accusers have gone. And the words he has for her are to my mind words of grace.

[42 : 16] Once again, having been writing on the ground, it tells us that he stood up in order to speak to her. Verse 10, Jesus straightened up and he asked a woman, where are they?

Has no one condemned you? We see he has two questions for the woman. One about her accusers and one about the judgment against her sin.

If you're taken to court and your accusers don't turn up, then you are set free. If you're taken to court and no judgment is made against you, you are set free.

And we have him here essentially doing this. Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you? And her response is simple. No one, sir. Jesus could simply have declared that they had gone but he wanted to engage with her that she herself would have to look into his eyes.

She herself would have to speak to him. She herself would have to deal on a one-to-one basis with him. No one, sir, she said.

[43 : 30] Simple use of sir, recognizing his authority. And Jesus' response was, then neither do I condemn you.

In effect, what he was doing was declaring her righteous and free to go. Now one thing he did not do at this point was to set aside the law, which is the trap that the teachers and the Pharisees had been trying to get him into.

And in my mind, by saying to her, neither do I condemn you, what he didn't say, but what I think is implicit from the whole of scripture, is that in effect he was saying, you are free to go because I'm going to pay the price for your sin.

He himself did not condemn her, but his justice and God's justice would be dealt properly at the proper time. And Jesus' justice inspires fear and reverence.

You can just imagine the woman standing in that situation after the noise of the accusations, and then Jesus' response to these men, and these men just drifting away while Jesus wrote in the ground.

[44 : 42] It's a classic case of you would have been able to hear a pin drop in that situation. What was going through her mind at the time? If we remember from the psalm that we sung, Psalm 130, the psalmist wrote, If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

And that was that poor woman in that situation. I'm sure she wasn't thinking solely of her adultery, but of all the other sins that she committed in her own life as well. But the psalmist goes on to write, But with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.

I'm sure at that moment she had a fear in her own heart, having come across the grace of Christ in action in her own life.

Jesus had not condemned her. She was effectively free to go. But before he lets her go, he says, Go now and leave your life of sin.

He made that declaration that she wasn't condemned, but now he moves on to say, Go and leave your life of sin. He's actually saying to her to go out from his presence at this moment, and secondly to leave her life of sin.

[46 : 12] I'm sure if it was in a different situation he would have spoken to her at more length. But while her accusers had left and had been dealt with, all of his audience, his congregation, would have been sitting there listening.

And I'm sure in Jesus' mind he was going to respect the dignity of the fact that while she was a sinner she was still created in the image of God and the one whom he was going to deal with gently in this situation.

So he gives her the command to go, but to leave her life of sin. And my own view is because Jesus said quite clearly to go and do this as a direct command straight to her that she will have gone and done that.

He didn't say anything equivocal, saying, if you do this, I will forgive you. But it was that command that he put out to her, go now and leave your life of sin.

And that was a direct order from him to her. And I'm convinced that she will have gone and done that. So she was declared not guilty in the eyes of that kangaroo court that those men had set up.

[47 : 30] But more importantly, she was being told by Jesus to go and live a holy life, one that did not see her indulging in sin of whatever form that was around her.

A remarkable encounter that she has with the living Christ in the situation. And I think we can see in this a picture of the salvation of any sinner, the salvation of you, the salvation of me, sin.

Because the reality is that prior to coming to Christ, we think so often of sin as being something sweet and tasty and delightful. And yet after we have sinned, so often we regret it.

And particularly if we start reading God's word for the first time and realise what the Bible has to say about sin, what God's view is of sin.

and as God comes into the situation and lets us know what he thinks of sin, then there's that sense of we might as well be in the temple courts with the whole world looking on and being in a place of judgment and justice because we are in the presence of the holy and the just God who convicts of sin and causes us to realise the consequences of judgment.

[48 : 54] and judgment brings fear into the hearts of sinners. But then finally we see that forgiveness leads to holiness.

Jesus declared that woman not to be guilty in the eyes of the law, not to deserve the condemnation of the law, but he set her free and he ordered her to go and live a holy life.

forgiveness always leads to holiness. There cannot be a separation between the two. You can't have Jesus and carry on living a sinful life.

If you have Jesus then your life is turned around. You are a new creation as we were hearing this morning. And while there may be occasional sins, sin does not have dominion over the believer. it's not the be all and end all in life. It's not that ruling principle because Jesus has become the ruling principle. So just as that woman had to face Jesus, each of us has to face Jesus.

[50 : 08] And whether we like it or not, in reality our sins are such that it is as if we, like that woman, had committed adultery. the Old Testament is full of God describing the children of Israel as being adulterous and running away after other gods.

He's speaking as a husband who's been scorned and he's constantly calling them back and he's bringing judgments upon them when they refuse to listen in order to call them back.

And so today the same with us. No matter how righteous you may think yourself to be and how self-righteous you might be in the way that you view other people, the reality is that God views each and every one like that woman as someone who's committed a sin that's very public.

He knows all about it. It deserves full judgment and the full weight of the law needs to come upon it. But the reality is in Christ that price can be paid by him.

And the repentant sinner can be set free to live a life of true holiness and to delight in the Christ who has died for them.

[51 : 26] So for each of us today, are we going to leave here tonight? Are we going to go into a new year believing in Christ and living a holy life?

are we going to be like those teachers of the law who heard the truth from Christ, knew the truth as they recognised that each of them were sinners and yet chose to walk away and do nothing about it and later on to come back in order to put Christ to death?

I think each of us knows which situation it's far better to be in. And therefore, my prayer is that for each of us this year, we will choose the right path and we will follow Christ and live the life that Christ orders us to live, one whereby we leave a life of sin and instead we live for holiness because Christ himself is holy.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord our God, we thank you once more for your word. We thank you, Lord, that your word is such glorious truth.

We thank you that Christ dealt with sin upon the cross, that each and every sin was taken upon his shoulders, that, Lord, his people might be set free, that they might be declared righteous in his sight, not because of any good in themselves, but solely because of the goodness and the

perfection that there is in Christ.

[53 : 06] Lord, we marvel that you would even think to do such a thing. And, Lord, we pray that this year we may see great numbers recognizing their sin, turning away from it and putting their faith in Christ.

Christ. Enable people to see, we pray. Open their hearts that they might receive your truth. And, Lord, may we truly be a rejoicing and a celebrating people in this congregation.

And may others around the country and around the world celebrate in the same way as seeing many come to Christ and rejoicing in an abundant harvest. And being able, Lord, to know that you, the living God, have saved them.

And that you, the living God, will see each and every believer home safely into your kingdom at the end of life. Give us the grace to believe, the grace to repent, and the grace, Lord, to trust in Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Our final hymn of praise is hymn 449. And mission praise, love divine, O loves excelling.

[54 : 26] Joy of heaven to earth, come down, fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown. We shall sing the whole of this hymn to God's praise.

Amen. Amen. love divine, O loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth, come down.

Fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.

Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love, thou art.

Visit us with thy salvation. enter every trembling heart.

[55 : 42] Breathe, O breathe, thy loving spirit into every troubled breast.

Let us all in thee inherit. let us find thy promise rest.

Take away the love of sinning, alpha and omega and o faith as is beginning.

set our hearts at liberty. Come almighty to deliver, let us all thy grace receive.

suddenly return, and never, nevermore thy temples leave.

[57 : 08] thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above.

pray and praise thee with our ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

finish then thy new creation. pure and spotless let us be.

let us see thy great salvation, salvation. perfectly restored in thee.

change from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our grace. till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder love and praise.

[58 : 29] and praise. and may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore.

and forevermore. Amen. amen. you you you you you you you