

6.8.23 am

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Date: 06 August 2023

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good morning, a warm welcome to the service this morning. Good to see all you, good to see some visitors, some who are familiar, who are back year on year, some who are perhaps here for the first time.

And if you're able to stay behind at the end of the service, there's tea and there's coffee and it would be good to get the chance to meet and to enjoy fellowship together. The notices have been on the screen. I'm just going to take a moment and go through them.

A holiday club Sunday school for primary school aged children. And if there are visitors here, which there are, you're welcome to take the wee ones through after the second praise.

Evening service is tonight at six o'clock. We're beginning a short study in Habakkuk, so be encouraged to come along this evening at six. Ladies fellowship tomorrow, as usual. There's a holiday club from tomorrow through to Wednesday in the church, the annual holiday club.

So it's from 10 till 12 for the children. Leaders will be here from about 9 till 12. So for the young ones, please take note of that and maybe ask your pals.

[1 : 05] I think there's a few signed up, not a huge number, but there's a few signed up so far, but they tend to all come in at the last minute. And for those who are not going to be at the holiday club, please pray for the work over the next few days.

Time of focus prayer for the holiday club later this afternoon, 5.20pm in the Sunday schoolroom. So again, please be praying for that tonight. Road to recovery on Tuesday night.

Prayer meeting on Wednesday on Zoom and in person. And the services next Sunday will be both taken by myself. The morning service, although I'll lead the service, we have a guest who will be with us who will give a word and also give us an update on ministry.

There's seats over this way if you want to come over. Good to see you. So Ennis McSween, who was with us in the past to preach, is going to be through in Harris.

He offered to preach and give us an update. They have planted, Smithton planted a church just on the outskirts of Inverness, a new development called Tornograin. They worship in the building of a Church of Scotland, just off the A96.

[2 : 22] And it's actually the first church I think I ever preached in. I did my first ever placement in the Church of Scotland in that building. So it's encouraging to see the work of the gospel going on in that place.

So Ennis will give us an update on ministry and share a word with us. And I'm thankful for that because a lot of my time this week will be spent in the holiday club. So that's next Sunday. Service is normal time.

Ennis will preach in the morning. Scalpy community are organising an outdoor Gaelic psalmery evening on Thursday, 17th of August, 7pm, outside the Scalpy Hall.

Donations for the Bethesda Hospice. Church cleaning rota you can see there. And I think these are all the notices. So let's begin this time of worship and we'll sing to God's praise.

We'll sing from Psalm 40. Psalm 48, verses 1 to 5, which six stanzas, that familiar psalm. I waited for the Lord my God and patiently did bear.

[3 : 19] At length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear. He took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay. And on a rock he set my feet, establishing my way.

He put a new song in my mouth, our God to magnify. Many shall see it and shall fear and on the Lord rely. Down to the end of verse 5. We stand to sing and we sing to God's praise.

I waited for the Lord my God and patiently did bear.

And on a fire. That led to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear.

He took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay.

[4 : 38] He put a new song in my mouth, our God to magnify.

God to magnify. Many shall see it and shall fear.

And on the Lord rely. O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies.

O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord has turned aside to light.

O Lord my God, so many are the wonders thou hast done.

[6 : 29] Thy gracious thoughts to us were far above all thoughts are gone.

In order none can break on them.

To thee it then declare. And see of death.

I would be more than can be number one.

Let's unite our hearts in prayer.

[7 : 37] Maybe just as we go to prayer as well I'll give you just a brief update. I was speaking to Shona's family this morning. And although she's had a good few days there's been a miraculous increase in strength since last Saturday when we saw her.

And there's been encouragements over the days as she's met with medical people. The last couple of days have been a little bit difficult. She's been a bit more confused.

And they're just keeping an eye on her and watching her at this time. So there's much to thank God for in terms of encouragements. We need to be fervent still in prayer and continue to pray for her.

Because there's a long way to go and it's still quite a fragile situation. So let's be praying for Shona. The family wanted me to share that.

And so let's continue to pray for her. So let's unite their hearts in prayer. Our Heavenly Father we thank you for this your day.

[8 : 42] We thank you for the gift that this day is to us. A day that has been set apart from all other days where we are told to be still. And know that you are God.

We thank you Lord that we have the command to stop work. We know that there are some who have work that they have to continue with. Works of necessity, works of mercy.

And we pray for them, those who would desire to be here. But who are engaged in these essential things. But we thank you Lord that you have given us the privilege, the desire, the opportunity, the freedom.

To be able to meet in this place on this your day. And we ask Lord that in the stillness of this hour. That we would know that you are with us.

We thank you Lord that we are called in the gospel to come to you. Jesus said come to me. All who are weary. All who are heavy laden. All who feel the weight of your sin.

[9 : 44] And I will give you rest. We thank you Lord for the invitation that came to and comes through the psalmist. And the psalm that we so often sing. That we are called to wait upon the Lord.

Lord. And we thank you that the prophet Isaiah reminds us. That those who await upon the Lord shall renew their strength. And so we pray for that renewed strength.

As we bow in your presence. We pray that you would meet with us. Lord that you would speak to us. That as we wait upon you. We would know your touch on our hearts.

That we would hear your voice. That we would sense your presence. And Lord that we would know that you were with us here. And that you are the God who is willing to bless.

We sang in the psalm of the grace. The gracious works that you have done. And what the psalmist saw only in a vague preview.

[10 : 45] We see with clarity as we meet on the Lord's Day. The first day of the week. The day where we remember that Jesus your Son. Our Savior.

Not only died for us. But he rose from the grave on the first day. And promised that there is eternal resurrection life. For all who believe.

And we know Lord that the salvation that we. That we are called to receive. Is not something that we can earn. It's not something that we can pay for. It's not something that we can work towards.

The work is done. It is finished. Cry Jesus from the cross. We thank you that the grace that we are. That we are in so desperate need of. In order that our souls would be saved.

And that we would receive satisfaction in this world. And security that is eternal. We thank you that all this is a gift. It's freely offered to us. In and through Jesus.

[11 : 46] We thank you Lord for the wondrous works that you have done. For the new song that you put in our mouths. When we believe in Jesus. And we ask Lord that you would enable us to sing that song.

In these moments as we unite our voices. And every day. In the way that we live. We pray that our lives would express. Our thankfulness.

And our gratitude to you. For all that you Father have done for us. In Christ. We pray for anyone here today. Who has not yet received grace.

Anyone who may still feel. Feel that weariness. And that sense of the burden. Of sin. Anyone who may be tired. From pursuing endless things in this world.

With a view to be satisfied. And find themselves still unsatisfied. Still thirsty. We pray for anyone who has that restlessness. Of soul that comes from wandering.

[12 : 48] Aimlessly in this world. And we ask that even today. They would hear the voice of Jesus. Saying come unto me. And rest. We pray Lord that you would enable.

Each one of us to come. In faith. And to receive that saving. And sustaining grace. That we need. We pray Holy Spirit. That you would be at work within us.

And in this place. The words of scripture as they're read. And as we meditate upon them. Would come with impact into our hearts. And would shape us. And mould us.

And change us. To be more and more like Jesus. And we pray that you would help us. To be servants of Jesus. Ambassadors for Christ in this world.

Help us Lord. In all the work of mission. That you call us to do. We pray for the holiday club this week. We ask Lord that you would bring the children. That their hearts would be open.

[13 : 44] That they would be. Those who see. And hear Jesus clearly. And we pray that they would come. To trust in Jesus. In the early years.

We pray for the team as well. That will teach them. And will lead. That they would be unity. That there would be joy. In serving you. And Lord that we would know. Your help. And your presence. Amongst us. We pray for Uist. As Gordon and others. Are in Uist at this time. And as there is a mission. Over the course of the week. We pray Lord that you would work. Through that team from OM.

And Lord that you would draw. People from that island. To the different locations. To hear the message of the gospel. We pray. That there would be some. Who would hear for the first time. Who would believe.

And who would be saved. And help us Lord we pray. Not just in the events. And in the missions. But in our daily conversations. To be those who speak often of Jesus.

[14 : 41] We pray that our conversations. Would be salted with the grace of the gospel. Give us courage. Give us opportunity. Give us sensitivity.

As we are called to speak to others. About Jesus. We pray for those in particular need today. For those who are struggling. We bring again to you Shona. As we have been doing over.

These last days especially. We ask Lord that your hand would be upon her. Your protection would be over her. We thank you Lord for. The huge. The huge leaps she's made.

In terms of strength. Over the last few days. And we ask Lord that as there. Has been a little confusion. Over the last couple of days. That you would enable those caring for her.

To be given wisdom. To know how to treat her best. We pray for her recovery. We pray that your hand of healing. Would be upon her. And that even in the storm. Of this difficulty.

[15 : 39] That she and the family. Would know the presence of Jesus with them. And for others as well Lord. We bring them to you. We think of Shawnee. From Kylas. And we ask Lord that.

Your hand of healing would be upon him also. And that we would see him back here. In this place. And even in the church. Over the course of the next few weeks Lord.

So we pray for others as well. Who are struggling with illness. Some at home. Some in hospital. We pray for those who struggle on with grief. That your comfort would be given to them.

And we pray for those who are anxious about the future. We think of the young ones. As they wait for exam results. And make decisions about the future. Guide them. Lead them. And help them to be making all these decisions with you.

As their saviour. And as their Lord. So hear our prayers. Take away our sin. Lead us and guide us. In the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray these things in Jesus name.

[16 : 38] And for his sake. Amen. Amen. Boys and girls. Would you like to come forward please? How are you all today?

Good stuff. Have you had a good few weeks? Good to see a few new faces as well. Oh there's more coming. This is an Invernesian. Or half herocho.

Have you all had a good summer holiday? Yeah. Good. It's not over. It's not over yet. Yeah I know. It's not over. It's only just a wee bit in. Weeks and weeks still. The holiday's still to go isn't it? Yeah. Yeah. So it's been good. Michael you were telling me you were going to be at the end of the earth. Oh yeah. Barvis. Did you reach there and back? Yeah. Good stuff. Yes. Good stuff. Good good. So you've had. Next week. Right. Good stuff. So you've had a good holiday so far. Yeah. And are you coming to the holiday club tomorrow everyone? Yes.

[17:49] Good stuff. Now most of you are. There's caruses still on the holiday. And we've got a princess there as well. Looking good today.

So I wanted to show you a couple as well. And I won't show you the pictures quite yet. Okay. But we were away on holiday in a place called the Lake District. And what do you think lives in the Lake District?

There's lots of lakes. But there's not just lots of lakes. There's also quite a lot of big hills or probably mountains. And one day we went up.

I think it's the highest mountain in the Lake District. Maybe it's not. Somebody's shaking their head at me. It was quite high anyway. It was high enough to be sore on my legs when we went up. It was quite a hot day.

And when we got to Keswick, we were in a place called Keswick. Half the congregation were there. There was all kinds of people from Harris who were in Keswick. And there was one day we bumped into a few folks.

[18:50] And we said, let's go up a hill. So McGilvery, Ewan, he was there. And so was Angus and Kirsty McKillor.

They went up the hill too. Josh went up the hill. And so did Joseph, who's there too. And so did Esther, who's sitting beside. And Anna went up. And I went up.

And Mary went up. And so we all went up this hill. And we were almost at the top of the hill. And somebody said, let's take a photograph. And so you can have a look at the photograph.

And I want you just to look at it for a second. Hopefully it'll come up. So do you remember who I said all went on the walk? Yeah?

So we're quite close to the top. Is everybody there? Who's missing? Lois?

[19:48] Lois wasn't on the walk, by the way. She'd rather do anything else in the world. Other than walk up a hill for no reason whatsoever. So Mary was taking the picture, I think.

So that's where she is. But who else is missing? Lois? Grace and Esther. So we're almost at the top of the hill. You can see the top just behind us there. And where's Grace?

No sign. Where's Esther? No sign. So what do you do? What do you do in that situation? Well, Angus and myself and Josh and Anna and Joseph and McGilvery, we just carried on to the top. Because we were all the way up, you know, and we wanted to get to the top. But what would the right thing to do have been, Michael? Go to the bottom and look for them, wasn't it? Go off looking for them. So Kirsty and Mary and the dog went off down the hill.

Even though they were almost at the top of the hill, and it was quite costly to go all the way back down. They went down the hill and down the hill and down the hill and down the hill until eventually they found Grace and Esther.

[21:08] What do you think they were doing? Do you think they were in grave danger? Do you think they were exhausted, starving and dehydrated? No, they were just sitting on the rocks.

They were too lazy to walk anymore. They'd just given up and thought it's easier to sit down. So they had to wander back to the car. And, oh, there's some more pictures of just when we were walking down towards Keswick.

So that was them. After they got found towards the bottom, they carried off back down to the car when the rest of us were up the top. But it was making me think, who is it that seeks us when we get lost?

Who seeks us when we get lost? Jesus does, that's right. Jesus seeks us when we're lost. And there's a story that he told.

Remember, he told a story about a shepherd, a good shepherd, and there was 99 sheep with him. And there was one sheep, not two sheep called Grace and Esther, but there was just one sheep that was lost.

[22:25] And Jesus, when he was teaching about himself, he said, he's like the good shepherd who goes out to find the one. Now for Mary and for Kirsty, I suppose it cost a fair bit to go down the

hill.

Not to get the top, to go all the way down to get them. But what did Jesus do? Where did Jesus come from to save us and find us? Michael. He came from heaven.

And he came all the way down to this world. And what did he do to save us and to find us so that we wouldn't be lost anymore? He lived for us.

And he died to us. He went all the way to the cross. He went all the way to the grave. Because after Jesus died, remember, his body was put into the tomb.

And that's how low down he went to save us. Is that where the story ended? What happened next? Pardon?

[23 : 25] That's right. I think what he said was, he rose. He rose from the dead. And he said, everyone who believes in him will not be lost anymore, but they'll have never ending life.

So let's be trusting in Jesus. Let's ask him to find us, to save us, to keep us, and to give us life that lasts forever.

We'll pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you love us. And we thank you that when we get lost, and we know that sin makes us lost, we thank you that you don't leave us lost in sin, but that you came into this world.

You left heaven. You came into this world even though it was so broken. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you lived for us that perfect life that we cannot live and that we're not living.

We thank you, Jesus, that you died on the cross. You went down into the grave to pay the price of our sin. And we thank you that when we believe in you, we are promised that we will have never, never ending life.

[24 : 35] So we praise you for who you are. We thank you for what you've done. And we ask, Lord, that whether we're very young like the ones at the front or whether we're a wee bit older, that we would trust you, that we would not remain lost, but that we would be found, that we would be saved, and that we would know life.

And we ask all this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We're going to sing now. We're going to sing Mission Praise 51, Be Thou My Vision. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, Not me, O Lord of my heart, To thee, Save thou, Thou art.

Thou my best God, My day or my night, Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, Thou my true word, I ever with thee, Thou with me, Lord.

Thou my great Father, I thy true Son. Thou in me dwelling, And I with thee one.

[26 : 24] Be thou my battle, Shield sword for the fight, Be thou my dignity, Thou my delight, Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower, Praise thou me heavenward, O power of my power.

Riches I heed not, Nor man's empty praise, Thou mine inheritance, Thou and always, Thou art the holy, First in my heart, My King of heaven, My treasure thou art, My King of heaven, After victory won, May I reach heaven's joys, O brightened sun, Heart of my own heart, Whatever be called, Still be my vision,

O ruler of all. Okay boys and girls, If you head to Sunday school, There's also a creche, If anyone needs to use a creche, There's a creche just behind that wall.

And if we could turn, To Exodus chapter 32, But as we, As the kids go out, Let's remember to be praying for them. Not least little Lachlan here.

Here. So we're going to read from Exodus chapter 32.

[28 : 48] We'll read the whole chapter. This is God's word. When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, They gathered round Aaron and said, Come, Make us gods who will go before us.

As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, We don't know what has happened to him. Aaron answered them, Take off the gold earrings that your wives, Your sons, And your daughters are wearing, And bring them to me.

So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him, And made it into an idol, Cast in the shape of a calf, Fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, These are your gods, O Israel, Who brought you up out of Egypt.

When Aaron saw this, He built an altar in front of the calf, And announced, Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord. So the next day the people rose early, And sacrificed burnt offerings, And presented fellowship offerings.

Afterwards they sat down to eat and drink, And got up to indulge in revelry. Then the Lord said to Moses, Go down, Because your people whom you brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt. [30 : 03] They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them, And have made themselves an idol, Cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it, And sacrificed to it, And have said, These are your gods, O Israel, Who brought you up out of Egypt.

I have seen these people, The Lord said to Moses, They are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone, So that my anger may burn against them, And that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation. But Moses sought the favor of the Lord as God. O Lord, He said, Why should your anger burn against your people, Whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?

Why should the Egyptians say it was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, And to wipe them off the face of the earth? Turn from your fierce anger, Relent, And do not bring disaster on your people.

Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, And Israel, To whom you swore by your own self, I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, And I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, And it will be their inheritance forever.

[31 : 12] Then the Lord relented, And did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. Moses turned, And went down the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands.

They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God. The writings was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, He said to Moses, There is the sound of war in the camp.

Moses replied, It is not the sound of victory. It is the sound of defeat. It is the sound of singing that I hear. When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, His anger burned. And he threw the tablets out of his hands, Breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire. Then he ground it to powder, Scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

He said to Aaron, What did these people do to you that you led them into such great sin? Do not be angry, my lord, Aaron answered. You know how prone these people are to evil.

[32 : 24] They said to me, Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, We don't know what has happened to him. So I told them, Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.

Then they gave me the gold. I threw it into the fire. And out came this calf. Moses saw that the people were running wild. And that Aaron had let them get out of control.

And so become a laughing stock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, Whoever is for the Lord, come to me. And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says.

Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp. From one end to the other. Each killing his brother and friend and neighbor. The Levites did as Moses commanded. And that day about three thousand of the people died.

Then Moses said, You have been set apart to the Lord today. For you were against your own sons and brothers. And he has blessed you on this day. The next day Moses said to the people, You have committed a great sin.

[33 : 28] But now I will go up to the Lord. Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. Moses went back to the Lord. And said, Oh, what a great sin these people have committed. They have made themselves gods of gold.

But now please forgive their sin. But if not, Then blot me out of the book you have written. The Lord replied to Moses, Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.

Now go lead the people to the place I spoke of. And my angel will go before you. Whoever, When the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin. And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did.

With the calf Aaron had made. Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We're going to sing again now to God's praise.

We sing from Psalm 119 verses 105 to 107. Read these verses in English. And we'll sing these verses in Gaelic.

[34 : 28] Thy word is to my feet a lamp and to my path a light. I swore and have and will perform to keep thy judgments right. I am with sore affliction, even overwhelmed, O Lord, And mercy raise and quicken me according to thy word.

We sing these two verses in Gaelic. We remain seated to sing in Gaelic. To God's praise. Everyone can CHOIR SINGS

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SONG CONTINUES SONG CONTINUES

SONG CONTINUES If you could turn back with me please to Exodus chapter 32.

[38 : 29] We'll pray as we go there. Lord God we thank you for your word and we pray for your help now as we take a few moments to study it.

We ask Lord for understanding. We pray that you would apply it to our lives. That you would help us to look into the mirror of your word and to see our own reflection.

But we ask Lord that for every look we take itself we would take five looks or ten looks at Jesus. That as we see our own need we would look to the the saviour Jesus who is sufficient for all things.

So hear us and help us we pray. We pray for the young ones as they are at Sunday school. We pray for the wee ones in the creche as well. Lord that they would know that you love them.

That they would understand in the early years that you Father sent your son to die for them. And Lord that they would walk with you all the days of their lives.

[39 : 35] We pray that for them. We pray that for ourselves too. We pray for those absent from us today. Some who are watching online just now. And we ask Lord that just as we receive encouragement from being with each other in your presence.

We pray that those who are at home. Even on their own would know that same encouragement. That the Holy Spirit himself would be near to them.

And that they would receive that grace that comes from your word as we submit to it. So hear our prayers. Help us we ask in Jesus name. Amen. What we're doing this morning is not something that I do very often.

Where we kind of parachute in on a text and just land in it for a sermon. But that's what we're going to do today. We're landing on Exodus 32.

It was a passage that made a bit of an impression on me before I went on holiday. And it's kind of remained with me over the course of the last few weeks. So I want to just take a few minutes and look at this passage.

[40 : 44] So what's the context as we land and as we look around? What's the context in Exodus 32? Well we see the children of Israel.

It takes us back to our Sunday school days. We heard lots of stories about the children of Israel. And we see the children of Israel in Exodus 32. And they're on a long journey.

They're partway through that journey. And the journey that they're on is in part a journey of their own making. If we were to rewind and look back at their track so far.

The children of Israel, they didn't trust God when they should have. So they didn't enter the promised land as early as they could have. So for 40 years, they have to wander through the wilderness.

And they're learning all kinds of lessons in the wilderness. They're learning the hard way. And I've told you before, I often think back to a football coach that we had in primary school.

[41 : 55] The team I was playing for, we weren't very good. But we liked playing football as part of the school team. And we had this coach, it was in Aberdeen. And he used to regularly say to us, exasperated at the end of a game.

He used to say, guys, there's an easy way to play football. And there's a hard way to play football. And you guys are doing it the hard way. You know, we wouldn't follow the simple lessons.

We kept making the same mistakes. And Israel, in their walk with God, so often they were doing it the hard way. And it took them into spiritual deserts.

It took them into barren wilderness terrain. It took them to places like Exodus 32. So what do we see in this passage?

Well, the first thing we see in the passage is a sinful people. They were God's people. But they were a sinful people. And you see that in verses 1 to verse 6.

[42 : 59] When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down the mountain, they gathered round Aaron and said, Come, make us gods who will go before us.

As for this fellow Moses, we don't know who brought us up out of Egypt. We don't know what has happened to him. So Aaron answered them, Take off the gold earrings that your wives and your sons and your daughters are wearing.

Bring them to me. So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol, cast in the shape of a calf, fastening with a tool.

Then they said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.

So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

[44 : 03] So these are sinful people. So how did they sin? Well, I think there's two stages that we can see in their sin.

There's an idleness, first of all, that then led to idolatry. So first of all, we see the idleness.

Now if we were to look in on Moses, Moses is up on the top of this mountain. He's meeting with the Lord. He's receiving the word of God.

That's what Moses is engaged with at that time. So what should the people be doing? Well, the people should be, they should be waiting for the Lord.

You know, as we sang in the Psalm, in Psalm 40, I waited for the Lord my God. There's that expectation that God is going to meet with us. He's going to speak to us. That's what the people had been told to do.

[45 : 01] If we were to rewind back to Exodus 19, the people were told, consecrate yourselves, prepare your hearts, prepare your lives, unblock your ears, get rid of the clutter of this world.

Moses is speaking with God. God has a word for you. So prepare your lives, keep your lives pure so you can hear God speak. that's what they'd been called to do.

But what were they actually doing? Well, they were doing nothing. They were being idle. They were checking their watches, turning to each other, saying, where's Moses?

Any days is this going to go on for? I don't know what's happened to him. I don't know if he's still alive. So they got impatient. They became more and more idle.

They became quarrelsome. And before we know it, they're asking for a new leader, someone who's going to be much easier going than the oh-so-serious Moses.

[46 : 18] And then the next thing is they're wanting a new God. They want to fabricate an idol. So there's an idleness.

They were called to be disciplined, to consecrate themselves, to wait for the Lord. They should have been in the spirit of worship. They should have been seeking to keep their lives pure.

But instead, the first stage is they just became idle. The spiritual discipline that they were called to just went out the window.

And the next stage is they're into idolatry. They go from idleness, where spiritual discipline evaporates, to idolatry.

And it's just a, it's a short step. But it's a clear process. And very quickly, everything falls apart. First, they take their eyes off God.

[47 : 28] They stop waiting on the Lord. They stop singing Be Thou My Vision. They start singing new songs. And then all holy living goes out the window.

And they have no interest in pursuing holiness. They have no interest in living a consecrated life.

And by verse 6, God's people are in the midst of a drunken party.

It's in full swing. They're dancing crazily around an idol. And it's a disaster area. You know, it's a sad scene.

But there's much that we can learn because just as they are a sinful people, we, starting with me, we're sinful people. And the truth is, when we take our eyes off the Lord, when we stop waiting on the Lord, when in the morning our Bibles remain closed, because we're too busy with everything that we're preoccupied with for the course of the day, when our prayers dry up, because we're too busy for prayer as well, when we start to get lazy about the means of grace, when idleness,

spiritually speaking, sets in, idolatry is just right in the corner.

It always is. And it's not going to be golden calves, but it could be just about anything else. I don't know what idols you wrestle with in your life, just as you don't know what idols perhaps I wrestle with in mine.

[49 : 12] But we all have idols. We all have things that get in between us and seeking the Lord. You know, it can be relationships that take priority.

It can be a career, a working pattern that just overwhelms everything else in life. It can be material possessions that start to possess us. It can be just hobbies, good things, that we just allow to become God things.

And when we take our eyes off the Lord, when we stop waiting on the Lord, these are the things that flood into our lives. And we can become overcome with idols.

So there's a warning here for us as we look in on this situation. And we might respond by saying, we'd never do that. I mean, idols and golden calves and all, you know, drunken parties and dancing around golden cows.

I mean, we'd never get into this kind of a mess. But that's exactly what they would have said if you'd asked them five minutes beforehand. I mean, think about it.

[50 : 26] These people had seen the supernatural power of God firsthand. They had seen seas being parted. These very people. They'd seen bread fall from heaven.

They'd seen water flow out of rocks in the middle of a dry, barren desert. desert. They had no shortage of tangible evidence of the one true God.

They had no reason to doubt God. But they did doubt very quickly. They became idle in their own quiet, spiritual inner life.

And then they were deep into idolatry. And so, I think Moses is telling us this story and saying to us, look and learn.

Don't be idle. But day by day, be disciplined and waiting upon the Lord. Week by week, be at the means of grace.

[51 : 33] do the things that God has directed us to do in order that we will have a close walk with Him. And don't turn to idols, says Moses.

Trust and keep trusting in the one true God who saves us. So there's a sinful people.

And we have a clear picture of them. God never photoshopped these images. We're given a clear, graphic, gritty picture of what these people fell into.

And the second thing we see here is the seeing God. The fact that God sees all us. Look at verses 7 to 10. The Lord said to Moses, go down because your people whom you have brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt.

They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them. They have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf and so on it goes. And there's much that we could say from verses 7 to 10 but the straightforward lesson, the most simple lesson I think we can take an application here is that God is the seeing God.

[52 : 48] Moses Moses couldn't see what was going on at the bottom of the hill but God could and he did and he still can.

He sees our lives. God is the all seeing God and I think there's both comfort and there's a sense of conviction there.

Because sometimes we stray. As the hymn writer put it that we often sing, prone to wander. Lord I feel it.

Sometimes we stray. We turn away like the children of Israel did. Sometimes our hearts start to be gripped by idols and God sees it.

Perhaps no one else sees it because we have a form of godliness we can put a face on. But God sees it. And if that's where we're at this morning then there's a word of conviction for you and I.

[54 : 11] God sees the way that we live. In terms of the positive and the comfort remember whatever you are, whoever you are, whatever situation, whatever storm you and I may be going through, God sees it.

You know if we're approaching at the end of the week thinking about exam results and we're crippled with anxiety thinking nobody gets this, nobody understands, nobody knows what's going on in my head and my heart, God sees you.

And when we feel alone and we're at home and we're perhaps listening to this at a distance, God sees you.

And when we're in a hospital ward, not sure what the next day and the next day and the next day holds. We're not able to see the people whom we love who are close to us.

God sees us, he cares for us, he is with us, wherever we are. Even when we feel like no one else sees us, even when we feel sometimes like we're invisible.

[55 : 32] And if we were wiped off the face of the earth, no one would notice. God sees, not a sparrow falls, that he does not see.

And there's comfort in that. That's the kind of personal, loving, caring God that we bow for. He's the seeing God who sees this sinful people.

And the third point that we can note here is that Moses, when he receives the bad news of what was going on at the bottom of the hill, he seeks the favor of God.

You can see that from verses 11 to verse 14. Moses sought the favor, the grace of the Lord his God.

O Lord, he said, why should your anger burn against your people whom you have brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say all these bad things about you?

[56 : 35] Why should your name be soiled by this? And so Moses, he seeks the favor of God. It's the first thing he does. Now for most leaders, I think, if you were told, just at the bottom of the hill, these people that you've led, these people that you've sought to guide, there's carnage down there, the first thing I think most of us would have been tempted to do is just go charging off down the hill.

I'll fix it. Let me at them. But that's not Moses' response. He doesn't race down the mountain to sort things out.

He will deal with the people. It's not that he's frightened to go there. He will deal with the people, but before he goes to the people, he comes to God and he intercedes for the people.

He prays and he doesn't make excuses. He doesn't try and justify their behavior. He seeks the favor of God.

He seeks the mercy of God. He seeks the grace of God. He says in New Testament terms, Lord, have mercy on us. We're sinners. And what Moses did is what you and I are called to do.

[58 : 05] We're called to pray. And that's our primary calling. As a congregation, as individual Christians, we are called to pray.

The life blood that goes through our veins, the pulse that indicates that there's life in us is prayer. And we are called to pray for the people that God has put around us.

Just as Moses was aware of all kinds of stuff going on at the bottom of the hill that was an offense against God and a disappointment, a discouragement to him, we just need to look around us in Scotland.

Any given day, any given week, we can even look around us wherever we are, whether it's in Harris or whether we're from some other place. Five minutes of looking around.

And we can see that there are all kinds of things going on in Scotland and England and Northern Ireland and across the world that are an offense against God and a discouragement to us if we are Christians.

[59 : 22] So what do we do? do we sink into despair and go silent? No, we don't. Do we charge around trying to fix it in our own strength, becoming amateur politicians?

There's a time and a place to engage in that way, but no, that's not our primary calling. Our primary calling is to pray, to intercede for those who will not pray for themselves.

our primary calling is to ask God to have mercy on us, to seek his favor. Like Abraham did, remember, for Sodom and Gomorrah, or like Daniel did, or like Habakkuk did, whom we'll meet tonight.

they all stood with their people. Moses stands with his people, and he prays on their behalf. He seeks the favor of God.

When did we last? Are we morning by morning seeking the favor, the mercy, the grace of God for Scotland? The first thing we see here, in this section, is that there is a seriousness about sin.

[60 : 51] There's a sinful people, although they didn't realize it themselves, it wasn't a conscious thing perhaps, in the first instance. There's a God who sees, and he points it out.

He reveals that to Moses, who seeks the favor of God, and then as Moses takes the next step, as he moves in the direction of the people, we see the seriousness that Moses has in terms of his understanding of sin.

Moses turned, verse 15, and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God, the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, there is the sound of war in the camp. Moses replied, it is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat, it is the sound of singing that I hear.

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned, and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

[61 : 59] Now, that wasn't a bad tempered act on the part of Moses. God's people had broken the covenant and the breaking of these tablets was indicative of that.

And then, verse 20, he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire. Then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it.

Moses is angry. And that anger in Moses is a right anger.

He has a zeal for the glory of God and an intolerance of sin. He sees the seriousness of sin.

But Aaron doesn't seem to share that, or at least, certainly not to the same degree. Moses, verse 21, said to Aaron, what did these people do to you?

[63 : 12] That you led them into such grace? I mean, can you just imagine the conversation? I've not been up there that long. What on earth happened, Aaron? What did they do to you to get into such an absolute state of affairs?

Aaron responds, do not be angry, my Lord. You know how prone these people are to evil. It's a pathetic response, isn't it?

Moses stands before God. He doesn't distance himself from the people. He stands with the people.

He intercedes on their behalf. Aaron says, you know what these people are like.

Nothing to do with me. You know the kind of nonsense they get up to. He separates himself from the people. He separates himself from the act. And then he gives this pathetic explanation.

They said to me, make us God so we'll go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him. So I told them, whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.

[64 : 14] Then they gave me the gold, I threw it into the fire, out popped the calf. It's ridiculous. It's comedic in a tragic kind of way.

Aaron is just, he's not taking any of this seriously. Yes, he sees the people straying, he sees the people wandering into idolatry, it doesn't faze him.

he's not serious about sin. And I suppose the question we should ask at this point is, where are we, who are we with on the issue of sin?

There's many people today who would be with Aaron, even in the church. Aaron intends to say, well let's not get too stressed about this Moses, let's not blow this out of proportion, let's not upset the people, because if we upset the people, Moses, you and I will become unpopular, life will become uncomfortable.

You know, Aaron should have upset the people. Aaron should have called the people to repent when he saw what they were doing, when he heard what they were saying, and that's not what the people wanted to hear, but it's what they needed to hear.

[65 : 41] But Aaron wasn't willing to preach him. Aaron, in this situation, wasn't serious about sin. He would rather have the people's approval than have God's approval.

He would rather remain popular with the people than speak the word of God. But Moses, however, was serious about sin.

Moses, verse 25, saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughing stock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, whoever is for the Lord, come to me.

And the Levites rallied to him. And you can read down from verse 27 through down to verse 30 plus and it makes for hard reading because what we see is that there is death in the camp.

Families were separated on that day and friendships were severed as God's judgment comes upon those who determine that they are against him.

[67 : 00] and not for him. There's death in the camp as God's judgment comes upon those who will not repent.

Warren Wiersbe, the commentator, says, Moses turned to the people and asked, who is on the Lord's side? This was an opportunity for all Israel to repent and reaffirm their commitment to the Lord, but only the Levites responded to the call and only the Levites who repented lived.

And so it's a difficult picture of this. It's a difficult picture that Moses paints for us in Exodus 32, but this is a picture of how things will be in the eternal sense.

Those who are for God will be with him. Those who are in Christ will live eternally and know that unbroken blessing.

and those who are against God, those who will not repent, those who will not come to Jesus, will die eternally.

[68 : 35] And families and friendships will either be bound together eternally with those who are in the Lord, or they will be broken eternally for those who are against them.

It's a hard picture, but this is spiritual reality. applies to every one of us. This applies to this place, this room, this village, this country, this world.

There's no middle ground here. There's no neutral group. There were those who were for God, who repented, who came to him, and who were saved, who lived.

there were those who didn't repent, and they died. We tend to shift uncomfortably over this kind of a passage.

It seems very stark. It seems so full of wrath, seriousness. We almost want to, in our culture, make excuses and explain it away and just tone it down a little.

[69 : 53] But that's because we have less of a sense of the holiness of God. And we have less of a sense of the seriousness of sin.

Sin is serious. So repent is the message that comes through the Lord, through Moses.

Turn from sin. Turn to the Lord. Be saved. Live.

Live. the final point is substitution. And we are allowed into this conversation that Moses has with the Lord as he goes back from being at the bottom of the hill and seeing the mess, he goes back up to speak with the Lord.

So Moses went back to the Lord and said, Oh, what a great sin these people have committed. They have made themselves gods of gold. But now please forgive their sin. But if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.

[71 : 17] The Lord replied to Moses, Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. Now go lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you.

However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin. And the Lord struck the people with a plague. Because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

And that's what Exodus 32 finishes. You know, if all we had was this chapter, there wouldn't be the happiest ender. Because Moses, in his prayer, as he speaks for the Lord, Moses seeks to be a substitute.

Moses asks for forgiveness for the people, and he says, if they can't be forgiven, then take me, block my name out, and leave their names in.

Accept me for them. Let me pay the price for their sin. Moses sees to be the substitute. true. So, if you're looking back at Moses in the last section, saying, what a cold, callous man.

[72 : 36] How could he give these instructions that involve all this death? Well, you've misread the heart of Moses, because you see the extent of his love for his people here. He says, accept me for them.

I will die if they can live. And Paul in Romans 9 says something similar. He says, I wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race.

Paul and Moses say at different times, let me be the substitute. And God says to Moses, as he says to Paul, you can't be the substitute.

You can't forgive their sin. You can't take the curse away. And if that's where things ended, there'd be no hope.

But that's not the end. Because Moses is pointing us forward to Jesus. Moses is given here something of the heart of Jesus.

[73 : 46] And what Moses could not do, Jesus did in full. Jesus could be the substitute.

Jesus could take the punishment for our sin. Jesus could take the curse of our sin, of our iniquity, of our idolatry, into his body on the tree.

And he did it. On the cross, that we keep coming back to, Jesus was our substitute he took our punishment.

He took the punishment of these people, he takes our punishment. The curse of our sin was taken into his body, as Peter puts it.

The plague of our sin struck him on the cross. the promise that we are given is that if we believe in him, our names will not be blotted out, but our names will be written eternally in the book of life.

[75 : 04] So believe in Jesus is the simple message that we come to week by week. Ask him to blot out your sin. Have you done that?

It's a simple, direct, practical question. have you asked Jesus to blot out your sin?

Have you asked him to save you? Have you called upon his name? Have you cried out for mercy? Have you asked him to be your substitute?

Because the good news of the gospel is that if we do, he will. He pushes away none that come to him. All who believe in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

And the transaction took place on the cross. And we're going to sing now of the power of the cross as we close.

[76 : 22] Mission praise 1217, the words on the screen. The power of the cross. την Porter hiino though and the pretty passed in Paul Go to see the dawn of the darkest day, Christ on the road to Calvary.

Try by sinful men, torn and beaten bare, nailed to a cross of wood.

This the power of the cross, Christ became, sing for us.

Took the blame, o'er the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross.

Oh, to see the pain written on your face, bearing the awesome weight of sin.

[78 : 14] Every bitter thought, every evil deed, burning your blood-samed blood.

This the power of the cross, Christ became, sing for us.

Took the blame, o'er the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross.

Now the day I please, now the ground beneath, Wakes as its maker, bust its head.

Curtains or in tune, they are raised to life. Finish the victory cry.

[79 : 35] Finish the power of the cross, Christ became, sing for us.

To the pain, o'er the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross.

For through your suffering, I am free.

Death is crushed to death, life is mine to live. One through your selfless love.

Thou'er the power of the cross, Christ became, sing for us.

[80 : 51] Took the blame, o'er the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore. Amen. After ch Official