

17.9.23 Evening Professor John Angus Macleod Testimony

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Preacher: Professor John Angus Macleod

[0 : 00] Well you can tell from my accent I'm definitely not from London, I'm definitely from the Isle of Lewis from the very north of the diamond, from the pinnacle up in the butt of Lewis.

Grew up there in my 50s and 60s, idyllic, absolutely idyllic as I'm sure most of you have back in the lifestyle then too. I think we had two cars in the village, we could just walk anywhere we liked and we used to be able to play cowboys and Indians which you're not even allowed to do now but we could do it then. It was an idyllic life. Looking at the fields, looking at the way in which you have your bales these days all rolled up but in my young day you'd be working on the stooks, gathering them together and by hand and I felt like I knew Ruth the Moabite test very well because that's just the kind of culture we grew up in. It seemed backward looking back now but it wasn't. It was rich. My mother, she had become a Christian at the age of 18. My father never professed faith. Not sure if he was a Christian or not.

I had an older sister. She became a Christian at the age of 17 in Inverness. I have a younger brother, three years younger and he has not yet professed faith. I'll tell you a wee bit about that. So that leaves me and myself. I used to look longingly at people walking to the prayer meeting during the week. We had four if not five prayer meetings during the week in this.

So there'd be Sunday morning ones before church, there'd be a Tuesday night one, a Wednesday night one, a Thursday morning one and a Thursday night one in different parts of Ness. And the way I used to look at Tosamatha in Ness, you would see people walking to the Lionel prayer meeting and I longed to go with them. No idea why. I can't say it was a deep spiritual longing. Of course I knew God, knew of God, knew of scripture. Of course I knew of heaven and I knew of hell. And of course I had dreams about these things that scared me. Of course I read my Bible. But when I looked at these people walking to the church, often old people, often dressed in black, strangely it was attractive to me, even though I was just a young lad. However, I went over to the Nicholson Institute at the age of 11 11. And in those days you had to stay over in Stornoway, even though you're only 28 miles from Ness.

[3 : 04] And you stayed in the notorious Gibson Hospital, in the Gibson Hostel in Stornoway, which was one long nightmare. Especially at age 11, you're sharing with seven other boys in a dormitory.

You imagine what that would be like, sharing a dormitory with seven other boys. And they could be rascals. But they were the easy ones. The difficult ones were the older boys. And there were two boys there in particular, from the west side of Lewis, that made our lives a nightmare.

You can't, you know, you have to use imagination at this point. They would pick me up by my hair. You see what I mean by imagination? They would pick me up by my hair and swing me around. Then they would take you by your legs and pull you down three flights of stairs on your bottom. You were bruised black and blue. They would beat you up in the toilets. It was horrendous.

These two boys in particular, they became very violent people later on. And one came to an untimely death. They were bullies of the worst kind.

[4 : 30] So bad that I thought, I'm not coping with this. So my week was spent. Monday morning, you go over on the bus.

Okay? But when you go over on the bus, you were dreading it. Because once you were there, it all began. You went through the week. And then Thursday night, you thought, Friday's coming. Great. On the bus home.

Saturday, freedom. Sunday, you began to think about going back over again. And so the nightmare went. Then you'd have a holiday at Easter. And at the Easter holidays, because you had two weeks

off then, Oh, it was brilliant. Till you had to go back.

And I went back one time, when I was age 12. And the bullying started. And I wasn't just the only one bullied. Myself, there was another boy who got it even worse than I did.

He had a lot of bloodshed, actually. But the bullying started. And I thought, can't take it. Can't take it. And I started walking. Started walking from the Gibson hostel, out into Newmarket, out of Laxdale, out onto the Bargast Moor.

[5 : 48] And I thought, the bus doesn't take long to get to Ness. So I, in my own mind, was starting to walk across the moor to Ness. Thankfully, a car driver picked me up and says, where are you going?

I just said, I'm going to Ness. You know, here's this 12-year-old boy, 7 o'clock at night, and he's going to Ness. Well, he took me to my auntie's house in Shadda.

Dropped me off there. And my auntie's son, who managed to phone somebody in the village with a phone, who told my mother what had happened.

And I got the bus back to Ness and went to our house. My mother opened the door. And the first thing she said to me was, How don't you know, you're going back over tomorrow?

That's the best thing she could have done. Best thing she could have done. She did hurt me too.

But the best thing, because if I had turned back then, it really would have changed my life.

[7 : 05] And I learned at that point that I really care about people. I hate bullying in any fashion. Whether it be bullying in society, in the church, in the ETS, in the family, in local congregations, I detest bullying.

Whether it be physical bullying or verbal bullying, I don't like it at all. And I would do anything to spend my life encouraging people who I know are going through difficult times.

That's how that began for me. But I wasn't a Christian. 15 years of age, I left home. You could leave school at 15. I wasn't absconding.

15 years of age, I left home. Are you okay, Michael? 15 years of age, I left home. And I began working for Plessy Telecoms. They were the ones doing standard telephone dialing at that time. Putting exchange in Stornoway. The exchange down here in Harris. Which I noticed you've let go to Rack and Ruin. It was nice when I left. But I was working with them.

[8 : 17] 15 went away to... Interestingly, the first time I left the island, I was age 15. And I left on a plane. A chartered plane.

Chartered by Plessy Telecommunications to take a group of us to Inverness and then journeyed on to Alapo. I'd never been on a boat.

Then I'd never seen a train except on television. And then I end up in this plane pretending that I knew everything about it.

And I knew absolutely nothing. Ended up in Alapo at the age of 15, nearly 16. And I thought, right.

Do I now go to church?

Because for the first time in my life, I could choose what to do. I could choose. No mother, no father to tell me what to do.

[9 : 18] What will I do? I began going to church. Donald McLeod was the man there. Remember Donald the dentist? As we used to call him then.

Donald the dentist. A lovely, gracious man. Even though he came from sky, he was a lovely, gracious man. And he, in his kindness, would come up to the telephone exchange to speak to me. Think of it now. I'm 16. And this minister comes in full clerical garb in front of all my friends in his kindness.

And I thought, it's the last thing I wanted to be seen with the minister. But I never forgot how kind he was. And there's only one sermon that I remember from Donald the dentist at that time.

He became a great friend later. It was, resist the devil and he will flee from you. And I chose not to resist the devil.

[10 : 21] And I didn't flee from him. And I stopped going to church. And I kind of plunged into the kind of stuff that everybody else did in the company that I was with.

Let's go forward. I was living here in Harris for about nine, ten months. I think. About old Mrs. McRae's house.

Her husband used to be captain of the ferries. One of them. Mrs. McRae, I think she was. She was a kindly lady and fed us well and looked after us.

This was part of where we went in the evenings or in the hotel across the air. It wasn't doing me spiritually any good. I did go to the Church of Scotland along with Mrs. McRae from time to time. Didn't do me any good either. Then I went eventually probably pretty far away from God.

[11:30] Then my sister became a Christian. She was a follower of the Lord for a number of years. Then on my 21st birthday I ended up being in Fife, the kingdom of Fife, living in Methil with a group of ten sons of the Grand Master of the Freemasons.

All of them very heavy drinkers. So on my 21st birthday night I thought what best thing can we do but give you a good night which they tried their best to do.

They worked in a distillery which didn't help. Well, the following morning I wasn't feeling great and a letter comes from my sister from Gordon Knows, Joan.

And Joan says, as she sends me greetings to my birthday, she says, talking about people in Ness who had died, she says, but for me, she said, death will be the dawning of a new day that will never end.

And I just broke down in tears. I thought, she's got something that I deeply want. Death will be the dawning of a new day for her that will never end.

[12:53] And I thought, if I had died last night, where would I have spent my eternity? Carry on the story for a wee while. I ended up eventually in Invergordon.

I was working at Arieth in Los by this stage doing telecoms work. Anybody remember Louis Palau? Louis Palau was doing the rounds then.

He's a South American evangelist, godly man, and he's preaching all over the place. And he preached actually as far north as Laird, Laird, in the Highlands, in the primary school.

And the girl that I was going out with at the time went along to that meeting and became soundly converted. But I was going out with her and I wasn't a Christian and she was.

So it was decided kind of mutually that we would part. Although I wasn't very happy about it. That was a Sunday and I came back home to the police house in Invergordon and it wasn't in good form at all.

[14:06] And I went up the stairs 11 o'clock at night and Joan and Steve, my sister and my brother-in-law were lying in bed. Don't know why but I ended up being in their bedroom, standing at the end of their bed and they started talking to me about Christ.

And they didn't tell me anything that I didn't know about Christ. I knew it all but they kept talking about Christ. Both of them lying in bed talking 11 o'clock at night, 2 o'clock in the morning I'm still standing there at the bed and they're talking about Christ.

But by this time I stopped listening because it was myself and God now. Everything they said was true though I'd heard it all my life.

At that moment I stopped listening to them and it was as of myself and God. This became personal at that moment for me.

And part of me was saying leave it, you're going down to Lincoln tomorrow, leave it till you come back, don't succumb to any of this pressure. And the other part was saying today is the day of salvation.

[15:29] You are not guaranteed any tomorrow. I was holding a set of car keys in my hand because I'd never reached my bedroom, just holding them in my hand and I was so tense that when I came to try to put the car keys in the ignition, the following morning they were bent.

So I had to straighten them but the tension was there and I took the keys and I dropped them on the bed. So if Joan and Steve are lying there and I dropped them on the bed, it's as if they didn't exist.

It was just myself and God and I went down on my knees and I prayed. I mean I've never done anything like this. Prayer, yes, but prayer in front of people, prayer in front of your loved ones, no, but they didn't matter.

It's as if they weren't there, it was myself and God. And I confessed my sin to God and I can't remember exactly what I said but I asked the Lord to become my saviour.

and I meant it and I waited and nothing happened, absolutely nothing.

[16:52] And the devil of course, he made the best of this, he says, what a fool, he says, you've made of yourself now in front of everyone. I lifted up my face and I was crying and I said, Steve, I said, there is no change.

And then Steve, bless him, said, Janangus, just believe. Do you know this? From that moment, I knew what it was to believe.

God had said, whoever believes in me, whoever comes to me, I will not cast out. And I thought, have I come to him?

Yeah. Well, I believe he won't cast me out. It made perfect sense. And it's as if all the promises of God became meaningful.

The one that Gordon was mentioning there in his prayer, those who are burdened and heavy laden, come, I'll give you rest. rest. Well, I've come. Well, he'll give you rest.

[18 : 08] And I actually understood in that moment what faith was. I took God at his word. And I'll tell you this, it was beautiful.

It was beautiful. The tears continued, but for a different reason. And I stopped listening to Satan. This was special. this was new.

And Joan and Steve, I wondered at the time, what did they think was going on? But it was a minute, two in the morning. I had to be up at five in the morning to drive down the A9, the A1, and the M1 to Lincoln.

Well, I went to bed and I was clutching the alarm clock. No phones in those days. We square alarm clock.

in case I would sleep in. And I had two fears. One is that I would sleep in. But by far, the greater fear was that when I would wake up, I'd be back to square one.

[19 : 16] Well, five o'clock came, the alarm went, and I wasn't back to square one. It was absolutely beautiful.

I quickly got up and washed and all the rest of it, and then I ran down the stairs to go to my car to drive away down south. My sister heard me. She ran down the stairs to put a leaflet into my hand, and the leaflet was called Journey Into Life.

Some of you may have seen it long ago, Journey Into Life. That's what I felt I was on. This was brand new for me. I drove down the A9, and I kept saying, I can call God Father.

I can call God Father, and mean it. I began singing in Gaelic, singing in English. There was nobody to hear me except God, but that was so special.

Now, I got all the way down the road, then. I was full of it. My heart was full with joy. Reached down to Lincoln late in the evening, and I had planned that I would meet my colleagues in a pub there.

[20 : 38] That was planned from before. I decided that would not be a good idea. I thought much better to phone my mother, to phone my mother.

in those days of mobile phones, that's not an issue. I had to find a phone box. I had to dial up the number this way.

None of this punching buttons. It was putting it all round. I dialed out the number, and as the number was ringing out, an awful thought came to me.

You probably won't understand it, but I didn't know how to tell my mother I was a Christian. Didn't know.

So she answers the phone. We went through the usual niceties, and then I said in Gaelic, who are me clearest around here?

[21 : 41] I found Christ last night. That's the way it was from my perspective. I was the one doing the finding. I found Christ.

I now know he found me, but I found Christ last night. Who are me clearest and right? And she didn't say a word.

But the devil did. She doesn't believe you, said the devil. I put the phone down. And of course, there's no 1471.

There's no reason called. There's no way for my mother to get back to me. And I put that phone down and I was in utter dejection.

So dejected. I thought, this is awful. What a fool I've been to think that I have become a Christian. Well, I thought I may as well go and meet the boys in the pub.

[22 : 43] So I went to the pub and yes, they were all there, circular table. I bought a round of brinks for them. We sat at the table and I looked at the brinks and I looked at my colleagues and I looked around at the pub and I got up and I ran out.

And I thought, no, no, something has changed. changed. Because this used to be my life, just as it was here. No, something has changed.

I went back to my digs. Does anybody use the word digs anymore? Lodgings? Yes? Went back to my lodgings where I was staying. Every time I left home, my mother surreptitiously, secretly, would

put a good book deep in my case, often wrapped inside a towel.

I thought, is there any book in my case? So I went to the case and I opened it and there was the book that my blessed mother had put there.

It's a set of sermons on this occasion, All of Grace by C.H. Spurgeon. and it was an olive green book, old as old could be.

[24 : 10] Well, I got this book alone in the lodgings, wondering am I a Christian or not, thinking I must be. And I began reading through some of these sermons and then I came to one, and I think it was mentioned tonight again by God, underneath are the everlasting arms.

underneath are the everlasting arms. When I read it, I just felt I was being cradled by God. Well, it's lovely.

It took me two days to phone my mother again, two days. And as soon as I phoned her, the first thing she said to me, some of you will understand it, have you left Doubting Castle yet?

For those of you who have read the Pilgrim's Progress, you'll understand. For those of you who haven't, read Pilgrim's Progress. Have you left Doubting Castle yet?

I thought that means she must think I'm a Christian because I'm on the journey. And I says, yes.

[25 : 28] And she talked to me as though I were a Christian. And for my mother, been a Christian since she was 18, to talk to me as a Christian, this was new.

It was, it really was strikingly beautiful. Later on she told me that the first time I had phoned her and said, who have me created the I found Christ last night.

She broke down. She was speechless with joy. She told me she went up to my bed at home in nests and knelt at the bed giving thanks to the Lord for saving me.

And at the same time, Satan is saying to me, she doesn't believe you. And I learned that Satan is a master of lies and not to be trusted.

Well, my mother and I became so close, just beautiful. It really was. I wanted to go forward and profess my faith.

[26 : 42] And I did it at the very next communion. Never regretted it. Never regretted it. Best thing I ever did, joining the people of God.

Within a very short time after that, and it was relatively short, I felt a deep burden to share the gospel. Strangely, to share the gospel with the Lord's people.

That's what my burden was at that time. And because of that, I decided to speak to my new girlfriend.

By this time I was in Aberdeen doing a lot of oil jobs with telecoms. and I decided to share with my girlfriend, Elizabeth, with whom I'm now married, 40, 42, 43 years.

And I said, I think the Lord's calling me into ministry. She said, well, forget it, she says. There's no way I'm going to be a minister's wife.

[27 : 56] That's just not going to happen. Well, I said, shall we pray about it? So, there down at the promenade in Aberdeen, night after night we prayed about it, till the point came where she was the one saying to me, if the Lord wants you to do this, I'll be with you.

That meant a lot, really did. Next problem was, of course, telling my minister back home, because that's where I was a member in Cross Free Church in Ness, because I was travelling all the time.

So, I thought, I've got to go and see Reverend Angus Smith. Now, Angus Smith was a lovely minister in my age. He came when I was age 11, and I watched him preach the gospel, tears streaming down his cheeks.

Not forced, it just happened. He loved the gospel and he loved the people. and I used to watch him listening to this beautiful gospel. Well, there were dozens of people converted under his ministry in this, but he was a formidable figure.

So, when we went home, I thought, I've got to go and tell Angus Smith. So, I said, can we go and speak somewhere? Yes. Sat down in his living room, left my girlfriend, friend, I don't know if we were engaged by that time or not, with his wife, going through to the living room, and I shared my heart with Angus Smith, going into the ministry, and he looked at me, and he says, let's pray.

[29 : 44] And let's pray meant you go down on your knees, side by side, at the couch, and he prayed. And what was striking was he prayed as if I was already in the ministry.

Praying that the Lord would put a, it was a praying garlic, including a garlic, that he would put a wall around me and protect me.

And I thought, he didn't need much convincing. you know, and he was more gracious than the television persona would lead you to think.

Well, he was a great encouragement. Eventually, of course, to go into the ministry, you had to get some understanding of education. I left school without hires, so I had to go and get my hires in the Aberdeen College of Commerce.

Got my hires. Then I had to go to university. So I went to Aberdeen University for four years and did an awful lot of divinity studies there and Greek and Hebrew to honest level and loved it.

[31 : 01] Loved it. I didn't even know how to write an essay. And then the Lord sent me these wonderful people during my hires to teach me how to structure my thought.

And they weren't Christians, but the Lord was so good to me. So one year in higher, four years doing university and then three further years at the Free Church College in Edinburgh.

In my years in Aberdeen University, I never heard a prayer in any of the lecturers. Not in my day.

David was there after me, but in my day there was no prayer in any of the lecturers.

When I came to the Free Church College, first day, prayer, and it was beautiful. And I spent three happy, further years studying theology with Free Church College and doing a degree with the London University at the same time.

Loved it. Am I going on too long? Then eventually I was called to be minister of Dingwall Free Church, 1989.

[32 : 26] Dingwall Free Church was a large congregation, a few hundred people, about 200, 186 homes I think it was. It was a great place to go and learn.

Lovely old people. Ah, you know this, I would sit with older folks all my days just to learn from them. And they taught me, and they were gracious to me.

And some of the best people in that congregation, I had lovely, 12 lovely elders, one of them, your friend Willie Murray, great people.

But some of the hardest working were a bunch of women. We started doing a messenger leaflet that every month would go to around 3,000 homes in Dingwall.

And who took it? This bunch of amazing women, aged most of them, 60 to maybe early 90s.

[33 : 32] They loved it. this was their ministry. And they would take it and talk to the people. They wouldn't just put it in the letterbox. Oh, no, no, this was their street.

So they took the opportunity to talk, to invite, to share. It was wonderful. But in these years, there were hard times too. I learned about human nature.

I learned about difficulties in the church. I learned that sometimes the people who seem to be your friends aren't always. I learned that the people who you think will never support you are the ones who do.

And I learned more than anything that I am a sinner, saved by grace. 1999, I was called then to go to the free church college, and I spent, do you know how many students I had in my first year?

These were troubling times in the free church. So 1999, I was appointed professor of creating New Testament. Do you know how many students I had in my first year?

[34 : 43] In total. One. Just one student. And I knew that. And Satan was saying to me, are you going to leave a large congregation to go and minister to one student?

What would you have done? Would you have gone? If you were just measuring numbers, you wouldn't have gone. You would have said, the free church college is finished.

But I thought to myself, well, if I don't go, what kind of message is that sending out? So I decided to go and to put my all into it.

And I did. And you know this, the Lord gave me wonderful colleagues to serve along with there. And we saw growth when it became Edinburgh Theological Seminary and in 2014.

And from one student we ended up having maybe 25 in each class, maybe 75. And then along with the Saturday course, maybe 150, 200 of them, and then masters and so on.

[36 : 07] So we had hundreds of students. We began with just one. numbers, I don't like the numbers. It's what you do in individual lives.

So when I came to retire, we wanted to go up and help somewhere through the church week. So Liz and I, who doesn't keep well now, we went up to Thershow, to Keithness, and they've been so welcoming, so welcoming.

And we have a home. And maybe that's all we can do, have a home. But when I see what David and Mary do in their home, I'm encouraged.

Because that's often where you share the most wonderful gospel. I think that's all I'll say about myself. Is there anybody that wants to ask anything urgent?
Are you all okay? I'll be happy to leave it there, Mr. Thank you.