

Last week we looked at Psalm 145. David's psalm of praise. His favourite psalm. Maybe we have enjoyed reading this through again in the past week.

Let me introduce us to what the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity says on this theme. I was encouraged two days ago to see that in Mark Greene's latest E-mail he quoted the same prophet and the same conflicts that we were talking about in last week's message. Maybe he was listening!

"Yes, the Lord is on his throne and all around him the angels sing 'Holy, Holy, Holy'. Yes, after the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah wrote 'The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end'. But those diamond verses of hope are preceded by 65 verses of lament.

We're quicker to declare final victory and imminent triumph, than to mourn present reality.

Right now, in the midst of a global pandemic with all its resultant emotional, physical, mental, and financial afflictions, you'd expect us to be singing songs of lament – expressing our grief, bewilderment, disorientation, and (above all our) yearning for God's intervention. But apparently, we aren't.

This could partly be because, despite having had quite a lot to lament in our country over the last fifty years, we don't really have many songs of laments to sing. Suffering is almost entirely absent from the repertoire of contemporary worship songs. CCLI's list of the top 100 songs being sung in church only features one song that could begin to be described as including lament. By comparison, 42 of the psalms, (that's 28%), are psalms of lament. Nor do the prophets seem reluctant to express their grief. So why are we?

We need to grieve. We need to name what is before us for what it is. Not to do so is to suppress the truth. And it is to numb the emotions. Those who are not given permission to grieve soon lose their capacity to truly rejoice in what is glorious."

It is really quite uncanny. It is remarkable. Because Mark and I are working completely independent of each other but once again we are saying the same thing. Because we are both dependent on the same Lord.

THIS IS WHAT COUNTS/THE ONLY THING THAT COUNTS which is the title of my message this morning.

As the train left the station the young Anglican vicar took off his cap, threw it in the air and shouted in a remarkably clear loud voice "Hallelujah".

Hearing this others on the platform came across to the normally conservative, reserved and shy clergyman and asked politely why he had shouted "Hallelujah" as the train started moving.

Well he said, as you know I have been living and working here in this back-of-beyond parish for a number of years and this is the first time I've seen something move.

It is just a picture. But I think it is clear and timely. And very relevant to our looking once again at Galatians which is going to help us see for the nth time that what Paul wants to convince the church of is the basis of faith and the foundation of life in a church fellowship. We need to know the basis on which we can move forward, not just as individuals and households but as a fellowship, as a church.

When we receive Christ as our Saviour and Lord we are recognising that we cannot save ourselves; we are acknowledging that we are unable to rescue ourselves from sin, from death and from hell.

How marvellous it is, that Christ died for us. And it is equally wonderful that if we believe in Him we are given new life in Him through His resurrection from the dead.

As it says in Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

We do not then need to add something else to Christ as necessary to salvation.

I know you like quizzes and here is the next question for you:

Which Hillsong hymn of praise did we sing on July 26?

Actually it is a trick question because for the first and only time we sang three. But the answer I am looking for is:

“Christ Is Enough”.

Christ is my reward and all of my devotion

There's nothing in this world that could ever satisfy

Through every trial my soul will sing

No turning back I've been set free

Christ is enough for me. Everything I need is in you

Christ my all in all, the joy of my salvation

And this hope will never fail. Heaven is our home.

Through every storm my soul will sing

Jesus is here, to God be the glory

Christ is enough for me

I have decided to follow Jesus

No turning back No turning back

The cross before me, the world behind me

No turning back No turning back

Christ is enough....is He enough for you and for me?

If we add anything to Christ, we lose Christ.

Salvation is in Christ alone, by grace alone and through faith alone.

There is no other way. There is no other way home.

Not through getting points by attending church gatherings or helping and serving in church groups.

Paul points out in verse 4 that those who are still trying to rescue themselves have become alienated from Christ and have fallen away from grace.

There is a bus stop for bus number 10 more or less close to where I live. When I say more or less I mean there used to be more buses and now there are less. Supposing I am in town on Saturday with some shopping and decide to take the bus home. Actually I almost never do but just supposing I did. I would probably go to the bus station and look at the timetable and definitely find nothing. Then to the exit from which the bus normally departs and wait but in vain. Then I could ask at the desk, maybe ring up Blackburn Private Hire and offer to drive the bus myself and help others too, offer to travel with a different company on a different route home and so on. I could even offer to take over scheduling the timetable and to take over the company myself, leading it in the direction I chose. OK I could have checked everything on my Smartphone first. But choosing this way, choosing that way, however flexible I try to be, however hard I try, however creative and thoughtful I may be in my search I am not going to get home on that bus. It is going nowhere. It is my way, but I am not going home that way.

It is like going home to Jesus. Not all roads lead to Rome. Jesus only is the way, the truth and the life. Only in Him and with Him do we get to our eternal home. It's not a matter of our ingenuity, our hard work, our ideas, our preferences, our initiative, our teamwork, our rational thinking, our anything. It's all Jesus. No-one else and nothing else.

In the musical "My Fair Lady" which is based on Shaw's "Pygmalion", Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl takes speech lessons from Professor Higgins, so that she may pass as a lady." One of the strengths or weaknesses of being a Cockney is the flexible facility in the pronunciation of "h".

As a test sentence Eliza has to learn to say, "In Hertford, Hereford and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly ever happen."

She starts off by saying, "In artford, ereford and ampshire urricanes arldy ever appen."

But eventually she manages it. Professor Higgins is amazed and exclaims "I think she's got it!"

We have spent many weeks together looking at the same theme. Not because it is my hobby. Not because I am obsessed by it! But because that is what Paul did. Because that is what God has given us in His Word. Because it is fundamentally important to the life of a Christian and to our life as a church.

Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

May we now say with Professor Higgins, "I think we've got it."

If so we can move on.

I am sure that each of us knows what is written in 1 Cor. 13:13. "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

1 Corinthians 13 gives us a very clear idea of love.

Hebrews 11 an equally clear understanding of faith.

But hope? Look at Galatians 5:5.

"For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope."

For those interested in such things the Greek word ἀπεκδεχόμεθα. (apekdechometha) which only appears three times in the New Testament means EAGERLY AWAIT.

Like I believe all of us have eagerly awaited being able to meet back here again in Bethesda.

This eagerly awaiting is not just a pious wish.

Not just waiting and hoping.

Not like waiting and hoping to win the lottery.

Not like waiting and hoping in Blackburn for the sun to come out.

Not waiting and hoping that Rovers will one year make the play-offs.

No. Real expectation. A certainty. A 100% guaranteed certainty.

Guaranteed by the Holy Spirit of God living in our hearts.

Romans 8:9 "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." (NIV)

Ephesians 1:13b-14 "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

The Holy Spirit is a deposit, a down-payment, a guarantee of our inheritance.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 "Now it is God who establishes both us and you in Christ. He anointed us, placed His seal on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a pledge of what is to come."

We are still under construction. We are saved and being saved. What we do comes from who we are. Not the other way around.

Who are we? We are in Christ. What do we do? We live in the Spirit.

Doing things does not save us.

As it says here in Galatians 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Faith expressing itself through works.

The Christian life is not only a life of faith; it is a life in the Spirit; the Holy Spirit living in our hearts produces good works of love. It is not that our works of love are added to faith as a second and subsidiary ground of our acceptance with God, but that the faith which saves is a faith which works, a faith which flows out in love.

Let me conclude by answering a question that was sent in to me in connection with faith and works. Because the answer is in this verse 6.

The question is, is Paul’s teaching in Galatians on faith and works out of harmony with what James writes in 2:14-19. The answer is it is not out of harmony. It is not a contradiction. There is no inherent difference. Paul and James are saying exactly the same thing, albeit in a slightly different way. Let me just read verse 14.

James 2:14 “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?”

Paul writes that the faith which saves is a faith which works, a faith which flows out in love.

Our hope is sure. The Holy Spirit of God lives in our hearts and works in our lives.

Hallelujah!

Thank you for listening!

Amen.