

Guest Preacher - Rev. Calum Macdonald

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Preacher: Rev. Calum Macdonald

[0:00] I'm going to turn now for a short while to the portion of the New Testament scriptures that we read.! The epistle to the Hebrews chapter 11 and read again verse 6.

This epistle is, as you know, not given a title as far as the authorship is concerned.

Most of the epistles that the Apostle Paul sent bear his name. Peter and John also are identified as the writers of the epistles that bear their name.

But this epistle is anonymous. That doesn't mean that people don't believe that they have no idea who wrote it. And there are various ways in which people are quite confident in asserting that the author is the Apostle Paul.

Although he is not identified as the one who wrote it. Based on grammar, use of words and all other devices that are used to argue for who the author is.

[1:53] It is asserted with a measure of certainty that Paul was the author. But one thing we can say with definite knowledge is that the author of this epistle loved Christ.

He loved Christ very much. And he wants the reader of this epistle to share that love for Christ.

And to come to an understanding of why Christ should be loved. The very opening verses of the letter brings us almost at once to think of why Christ should be loved.

Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.

Through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

[3:11] And so on. He goes on to speak about his role as redeemer. So without hesitation, the author introduces to us the passion of Christ as creator.

As the very God who is very God. As the one who is the savior of sinners. And it is therefore not any surprise that he encourages us to acquaint ourselves with the passion of Christ.

And to trust in him. Our soul. To his keeping. And in chapter 11, the apostle speaks about The nature of the relationship that should exist Between Christ and those who have discovered who he is, what he is, and what he has come into the world to do.

He describes to us the reality of that relationship in terms of faith. And I want us just very briefly to think of what is implied by the words of verse 6.

Just a simple statement that we cannot escape from. He insists that faith is needed to be able to please God.

[4:53] Faith is needed to be able to please God. It's a simple statement. But a statement. If it is true, and it is.

That requires us to ask the question of ourselves. Why is it necessary for me to please God? And I suppose it's a question that leads on from the statement.

The second thing is really that statement. Faith is something that tells us that there is a requirement for the person to come to God.

It's not optional. It's not an either or. It is not something that we can make do without. Faith is needed to come to God.

And it is necessary for faith to be in existence in order for us to come to God. And the third thing that is a word of comfort, I suppose, to everyone who has explored the reality or otherwise of faith in their experience.

[6 : 09] Faith is something that has at its heart an understanding that God is willing to receive the passion who comes to him by way of faith.

He is willing to receive them and willing to deal with them at the point of their greatest need. And in the introductory passage that we just touched on at the beginning of the epistle, it directs us to the need that we have, the most pressing need.

I'm sure everybody here today has needs. You have concerns. You have cares. And some of them are very burdensome. They are very onerous.

They are very important to you. And you do your best to address them. But whoever you are, whatever you are, the greatest need that any one of us has, has to do with the need of our soul.

Because physical needs, mental needs, even spiritual needs, as far as they have a temporal experience, as far as they have to do with our life here in this world, there has to be a realization that this world is not everything, that there is a world to come, that there is life in the hereafter.

[7 : 44] And when God created man, he created man, body and soul. And he tells us that when sin came into the world, that the outcome of sin was threefold.

There was the death of the spirit. And the relationship that existed between God and man was fractured and could not be restored by anything that man did.

God himself had to bring about that restoration. There is the physical dimension because at the moment of sin entering into the experience of man, the body was dying.

The body was dying. Even as an infant, that child that you're looking of, that is newborn, that has just recently drawn its first few breaths, that child is destined to die.

When? We don't know. But death is in its cup because God has decreed that the day that sin is in the experience of man, they shall surely die.

[8 : 56] It's not the might, or given certain circumstances, science decrees it, we can extend our days. That's not the question. God says in his word, we shall surely die.

But it's not just a physical death or a spiritual death. There is the prospect of eternal death. Because when man fell, his separation between God and himself, the separation that he experienced ensured that his existence in this world was marred.

But also that God had established that at the point of death, the God who created man as the preeminent element or preeminent part of his creation.

Created him body and soul. Created him so that the soul would exist for all eternity in God's presence. Created him body and soul.

Many of you here, obviously, if not all of you, I would doubt if you would be here if you didn't have some knowledge of God. Whether that knowledge is complete.

[10 : 44] Complete in the sense of that knowledge of God lacks nothing that is necessary for you to appreciate who God is. And yet there are many in this world and their view of God is incomplete.

Their understanding of God is limited. Because by nature, we fell from that relationship to God that ensured that our knowledge of him was perfect.

That it lacked nothing. I often go back to the fall. Go back to the reaction of Adam when he discovered in himself that he was a sinner.

He went to cover his nakedness. And that base instinct to hide his nakedness is not immediately understood.

It's not easily understood. It's not easily understood. Why would he want to, if he had before he sinned, lived without sensing his shame?

[12:02] His nakedness did not mean shame to him before he fell. And yet after he fell, his nakedness was shameful. But that itself, I think, merits more, a deeper reflection.

But the fact that Adam, remember he knew God. He knew all about God. He knew that God knew him.

And yet he went to hide from God. How could a person who knew God and understood that God was omnipotent, and omniscient, and everything else that he understood by nature as created about God?

And yet his instinct took him to hide from God. He lost sight of something that was true of God very quickly. And if you remind yourself of that dramatic downturn in his understanding, many people today have a vision of God that is limited by their experience of who God is.

And many have an instinct to preserve the need to have God in their life.

[13:31] And yet the way that they live their life, in order to make themselves comfortable with the idea of God, they are responsible for creating a God of their own making.

And I suppose there is a gradient that you could explore as to how extensive that experience of God is.

You know, every one of you here who sits under God's word from time to time will be exposed to teachings that explain to you some of the characteristics of God.

Some of the things that speak of the nature of God, speak of his holiness, speak of his intimate knowledge of all that is going on in the world, speak of his power, and so on.

Your exposure to such teachings inevitably are imbibed by you. So you have this vision of God without necessarily that knowledge of God being complete.

[14:45] Because some of you may well not have understood that God is a saviour, that God is one who is a redeemer, that God is one who has undertaken to take the sinner to a place of safety, and who has ordained the means by which that is going to happen.

Your view of God might not incorporate that understanding. And I've often heard people say, and I say it so often myself, that many who were unconverted always believed in God, they say.

They always believed in God. And yet, if you were to probe, and if you were to try and penetrate the extent of their belief, or the nature of their belief, for an understanding of who God was, it would be a corrupt form of that deity that they were in possession of.

There were always limits placed on what they understood God to be. God was sometimes willing to turn a blind eye to sin, their sin in particular.

God was someone who they looked upon as a benevolent grandparent, who, if you are grandparents, you know you turn a kindly eye to the misbehavings of grandchildren, and children, far more so than the stern parent.

[16:30] And in that sense, people look at God and they say, well, he's not really all that angry. He's not all that predisposed to condemn my sin, even though that sin is something that he identifies and condemns.

So there's a person who, in their own mind, they know God. They say they understand who God is and what God does, and yet their estimation of who God is is quite a wrong one.

Now, what we're told here is that Enoch was translated because he pleased God.

And we're told that Abel pleased God by offering a more exalted or excellent sacrifice.

They were commended because they pleased God by what they did. And at the heart of these statements is an understanding that God is someone that we need to please.

[17:51] He takes pleasure, not in our good deeds, not in our control of our lives that prevents us from doing bad things, not in the observations that we have of what is decorous, what's right and proper in the eyes of men.

He takes pleasure in what we do. That is the response of faith. That is the response of an understanding of who God is, what God does, what God has done in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

And the writer of this epistle goes to, goes to, you know, he runs through this list of saints.

And he commends their activities. But at the heart of what is commended by him is the fact that these things that were done by them were done because they trusted in God, they believed God, and they rested upon God's promises as far as they were aware of them.

And probably at the heart of what is done there is that what they do, what they've done, what they've been described as doing, is not something that they have done with this first order of pleasing myself.

[19:46] But first in order was the pleasing of what God, they did what God would have them do because they knew who God was and what God was like.

And this is a hard thing for many people to believe because we live in a world that is pleasure-oriented.

Pleasure, and by pleasure I mean pleasing myself, doing what I want to do for my, for my, something that I want for reasons that are important to me.

But what faith would have us understand is that as a priority, it's not me that matters, but what God would have me to do.

Faith requires a person to have a God who is sovereign, to have a God that has the last word, to understand that this God is not the one that we have made ourselves, but the God that has revealed himself to us through the pages of Scripture.

[21:11] And while we may grapple with the truths that he has revealed to us and himself through these truths and find our limited faculties struggle to take them all on board, nevertheless, these are the things that direct us to our own limitations and the unlimited capacity that God has for the things that command him.

I'm reading through a book just now. I've had it for many years, and it's been up and down from the shelf, I suppose. I'm not a scientist, so I suppose this book requires more of me than I can supply.

It's a book by a man called Professor Edgar Andrews. He's a scientist and a Christian, and he deals with some of the things that atheists, those who are antagonistic to God and to the idea of God, the things that they come up with that are supposed to be answers to God and answers for the non-existence of God.

And the title of the book, it was written 20 years ago, well, 10, 15 years ago, the title he gives to the book is a strange title, Who Made God?

Who Made God? But it's deliberately provocative because everything else they direct attention to as a source.

[23:00] The world has a beginning. What's in the world has a beginning. But the question, Who Made God? requires an answer.

Well, when did God begin? Where did God begin? At what point do we find the beginning of God? And the answer the Bible supplies to us is God has no beginning and God has no end.

And God is, as we said, the Ancient of Days, although we used it in a different way. He is the Ancient of the Days. He is someone who has, He is eternal, as we were taught in the Shorter Catechism when we were children.

the answer to the question, Who is God? Is God? Who is God? God is spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

God is, and all of these things that are contained within that answer are found, and you can glean them from your Bibles, that this God is someone who is unlike anything else that you can discover in the world that you live in that has origins.

[24:26] The writer, communicator, John Blanchard, compiled his own list, which you could put alongside your Shorter Catechism, and when you look at what he says, I suppose you can't disagree with anything that he said.

God is unique, personal, plural, spiritual, eternally self-existent, transcendent, imminent, omniscient, and immutable, holy, loving, creator, ruler, judge of all mankind, and so on, and so forth.

There are many things that would speak to you about the nature of God, the person of God, the things that are all true of him, and we need to understand this is the God that we have to come to, and this is the God that we must know in order to come to him.

Any other God is a God of our own making, or somebody else's making. And this is the God who has revealed himself to us in different ways in order that we are persuaded that we have to come to him.

There are many. It's quite amazing, I suppose. Go back to the Old Testament. These children of Israel, they came under the hand of God from the house of bondage.

[25:54] They were saved from persecution. They were saved from certain death because they were destined to die as slaves in Egypt. And God took them out of that slavery.

And one of the first things they did following their salvation was they, under the direction of Beren, they made for themselves a God. They worshipped a God because they needed to be able to see the invisible God.

They created something that was visible. And that's the natural condition of man, always wanting to do something that God forbids because they're not happy with who God is or what God does.

And we have to remind ourselves of that because the God that we come to must be real. The God we come to, to worship, must be the God of the Scripture, not a God of our own making or a figment of somebody else's imagination.

Jesus Christ, when he spoke to those who were spiritual leaders in his own day, who worshipped God and thought they knew God, Jesus called them children of the devil.

[27:16] And he did that because they were usurping the authority that God alone possessed, claiming it for themselves and making false images of God in the minds of the people that they were supposed to be spiritual leaders of.

The more we know who the God of Scripture is, the more we know about the God of Scripture, we know that we cannot put any other God before him or in his place.

And the place that the writer of this epistle takes us to is to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is described as the alone saviour of sinners, who is the image of the invisible God, who comes to do God's bidding, who suffers on the cross, who dies in the place of sinners, and who brings salvation to the sight of frail, failing, fallen man.

And he encourages us to take our weakness to the all-powerful God and put us trust in him. Mercy is necessary and without it our ability to experience salvation is, it doesn't exist.

When you notice these words, faith knows that God is. not only does faith know that God is, and that God is the God of the Scripture, but that he is willing to save to the othermost those who come to him by way of Christ.

[29 : 15] You look again at this verse, he says here, without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

What reward would you seek from this God for yourself? Well, those who are God's children, they understand what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Paul writes in his epistle to the Ephesians these words in chapter 2, by grace he said you have been saved through faith.

This is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Maybe these are the words of a theologian and they are. Maybe they have much in them that you can't begin to understand, but he takes you as God to God by way of Christ Jesus.

[30 : 30] The Christ upon whom your faith rests as someone who understands that this is the person by whom God has decreed salvation is possible.

Abraham of old was given a promise. He was given a promise concerning a land, a possession, but he was told that this was going to be possible because of who his God was.

I am, he said, thy shield and exceeding great reward. And this is what he promises here in this chapter. The reward of faith that belongs to every child of God.

The reward that follows on from a perception that is the result of the reality of faith. The reality of what God has bestowed upon us.

The reality of what God has given to his own people. Our needs are met in Christ Jesus. That's what this passage reminds us of.

[31 : 39] Our needs so great as need met in Christ and only Christ. And do you believe that? That's the thing. Do you trust that Christ is able to do what you could not do, what you cannot do?

Do you believe that this is what God has said before us in his gospel, in the word that is your gospel, the gospel of good news to you concerning salvation through God's way and by God's way alone.

May God use these few thoughts to generate thoughts in your own heart. Questions, take your questions to God. Take your queries to God.

Take your explore God, compare him, explore the God of the Bible, compare him to the God of your imagination and see if they are reconciled, see if they are quite different.

May God bless those these thoughts. Let's pray. Lord, help us to understand that there is but one God, the only living and true God, and that you have decreed salvation through Christ Jesus the Lord, and salvation is possible for those who put their trust, in what you do through him, even on the cross.

[33 : 03] Bless us in his name today, and remember all that is done here in the congregation.
Remember the servants in the evening, and your servant who preaches the word to them.

Hear our prayers, forgive our sins in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion from Psalm 84. Psalm 84, and we're singing from the Scottish Psalter, and from verse 8 to the end.

Lord God of hosts, my prayer here, O Jacob's God, give ear, see God our shield, look on the face of thine anointed, anointed, dear, and so on.

Lord God of hosts, my prayer here. Lord God of hosts, my prayer here, O Jacob's God, give me ear, see God our shield, God, the face of thine anointed ear, for in thy words would exist a thousand rather than my God's will

I keep adorned and dwell in tents of sin, for God the Lord's sun and shield till grace and glory give and dwell with all no good from them but upright be to live there.

[35 : 31] O thou that art the Lord of hosts, that man is truly blessed, who by a sure in confidence on thee O Lord the Christ Now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all now and always.

Amen.