

Glorious things of You are spoken

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to turn this morning to God's Word in the Old Testament and to Psalm 87. On the holy mountain stands the city he founded.

The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God.

Among those who know me, I mention Rahab and Babylon and Philistia and Tyre and Cush. This one was born there, they say, and of Zion it shall be said, this one and that one were born in her. For the Most High himself will establish her. The Lord records as he registers the people, this one was born there.

Especially the words there in verse 6, the Lord records as he registers the people, this one was born there.

[1 : 39] As much as I like this particular version of the scriptures, I find the words perhaps used in the book of Psalms is much easier to understand.

The Lord says, the Lord shall count when he writes up the people that this man was born there.

The problem with many of the churches in the world today is that we're not right with God.

We don't worship God, as I mentioned earlier on, with reverence and with godly fear. We try and take God down to our own level. We sometimes address him in prayer as very friendly terms.

And yet the Lord Jesus Christ gives the pattern as to how we should address God. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. There is an example there for us that when we approach God, we do so in terms which will show our reverence of him and our godly fear of a God who is almighty, all-powerful, all-knowing.

[3 : 07] Those words we read in 1 Peter chapter 1 remind us that here we also have a holy God. Where he says to us, be ye holy, for I am holy.

Isaiah in the Old Testament reminds us in chapter 59 where he says, My arm is not shortened that I cannot save, neither my ear heavy that I cannot hear, but your sins have separated between you and your God.

And so we're reminded there that there is a controversy between God and us. Controversy caused by our first parents, which continues on down to the generations.

The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity. All mankind sins hit him and fell with him in his first transgression.

And that sin, which we call today a fallen human nature, is that which separates between God and us. And God has to find a way whereby he can take that barrier out of the way and he can once again have fellowship with us.

[4 : 27] And that's what the gospel is all about. Christ comes into this world to seek and to save the lost and to give his life a ransom for the many. He comes to take our sins upon himself.

He comes to take our sins, nailing them to the cross and taking them out of the way. Or as sometimes it used to be said in prayer, he overcomes the mountain of provocation that exists between him and ourselves, soul making peace.

And so this is the gospel, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. In scripture, we often find that the places where God establishes his character, his holiness, is in the high places of the creation.

The first place, of course, is in Eden itself. We're reminded if we read the early chapters of Genesis that the rivers of the world flew out, flowed out of Eden.

So it was a high place. And in that place, God established his holiness, established the boundaries by which man was to live. Man decided he would break through those boundaries and so that controversy was established.

[5 : 52] But in his mercy, God didn't leave that controversy in the way it was. He immediately established a way whereby that controversy could be settled.

In the coming of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, he would send the seed of the woman who would come to crush the head of the serpent. So once again, making peace.

Then also, he established his holiness, established his character at the gates of Eden, the place where Adam and Eve went to worship. They would go to worship in that place where there was an angel with a flaming sword barring the way to the tree of life.

And there, Adam and Eve would go to worship. And there they would describe to their children, Cain and Abel, the way that they should worship.

And when Cain decided he would worship in his own way, God was displeased. And that displeasure led to Cain hating his brother and eventually killing him. And Cain then was cast out from the family of God and he wandered the earth, knowing and fearing that everyone who saw him would kill him.

[7 : 05] But God put a sign upon him so that men would not kill him. And so we have this whole aspect of God establishing his personality, his holiness, his character, so that we would know that he was a holy God.

God also, in his own way, revealed himself at Mount Ararat, that place where the ark came to rest after the flood.

There God made a covenant with man. When I see the bow in the cloud, I will remember. I will remember never again to bring destruction and waste upon this world by water.

And God has kept that covenant even until this stage. And after Ararat, he also revealed himself at Mount Moriah, where Abraham had to go.

Abraham was told to go to Mount Moriah, three days' journey away in there, to offer up his own son. A declaration of God's plan of salvation to Abraham.

[8 : 09] Abraham came to see that in the way that he was prepared to obey God, that God also would one day offer up his own son for us and for our salvation.

That it wouldn't be the ram that would be sacrificed, but that it would be God's own son, who would bring the way of peace and reconciliation between him and the world.

And so on through Sinai, where God gave the commandments, where the people would not come so close to the mountain because they feared. And in Zion, where God set up his holy place, the place we were reading off here, the place that God's love above all places of the earth, the city of Jerusalem, where he placed his name, where his temple was built by Solomon, and where the Shekinah of God dwelt between the cherubim there in Jerusalem.

And also on Golgotha, where God offered up his own son. He put him to grief. He made his soul an offering for sin, for our sin, so that we could be reconciled to God.

And so in all these different ways, we see God declaring what sort of God he is. He's not a figment of our imagination. It's not something that we make up as we go along.

[9 : 32] It is what we preach from the scriptures of God. We are people of the book. We are the people of the Bible, who read the Bible, who strive to understand what it says in the Bible, and to live our lives according to the precepts in the scriptures.

I'm sure as you grew up, you saw the books line upon line and precept upon precept. And they're books for children, but yet books also to instruct us. In the same way, it's a children's catechism. Not only instructs children, but also instructs us as to many of the great themes of scripture, and how we should also relate to God.

The scriptures principally teach what we are to know concerning God, and what God requires of us. And the whole of scripture brings us to know what God requires of us, how we should relate to him, and how we should go on living out our days here in this world.

But to come to the psalm that we're looking at here, God speaks of writing up the names of his people in the book.

[10 : 46] He's taking a census of his people and writing them up in his book. In verse 4, we are reminded of all the different tribes and nations of the world.

We are told here about Rahab. Now, Rahab was in fact Egypt, where the children of Israel began their journey to nationhood, and from where they left to go on their journey to Canaan.

Then also, of Babylon, the place from where Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, and came to settle in Canaan. There is also Philistia, or the Philistines, and those warlike tribes who dwelt on the borders

of Israel.

And there is Tyre, that great warlike nation that was on the north of Israel, and also, we're told, of Cush. Those lands we today think the south of Egypt, where Sudan is, and those places.

And so, all these nations, which was really the known world of the people of that day, God was going to take people out of all these nations, the people who had invaded Israel, the people who had attacked Israel, the people who were at war against Israel, for a large proportion of the time.

[12:10] And yet, God was going to make peace with these people by His power, and bring them to know Him as Lord, in the same way as the Lord makes peace with us. We have a controversy with God, or He has a controversy with us, rather, because of what we are, the way we live, and how we relate to Him and to each other.

And God wants from us the obedience that He has detailed for us in His old word. And yet, He wants to make peace with us.

The peace that comes through the death of His Lord Jesus Christ. The death which comes to us because of what He suffered, and what He brought into being, this way of salvation, which is open to us through Him.

Now, when Abraham first went down to Ur, there was himself, and there was Isaac, and then Jacob, and Jacob goes all the way down into Egypt.

And in Egypt, there's the numbering of the people. And it's only three score and ten, and seventy people. That was the full number of the people who worshipped God, and knew God as their God.

[13:34] And so we come there to this first name that we know of God in the Old Testament, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. Because He is their Lord, and He is their God. And they know Him, they spoke to Him, they worshipped Him, and He directed them in all their different ways.

All the children, all the people in the world who feared God at that time were the children of one man. But then also there was another census when the people came out of Egypt.

And as they came out of that land, they came out because God had freed them from that land of tyranny and that land of oppression. But even in the house of bondage in Egypt, the Lord had multiplied His people.

He had brought them to multiply even in the face of the oppression and the killing of the children.

And the more that they were oppressed, the more they numbered.

And although only 70 people went down into the land of Egypt, 400 years later, 600,000 men, all prepared for battle, besides women and children, came out of that land.

[14:54] As they lived in obedience to God, God so prospered them, and God so multiplied them. And God brought them to know prosperity, even in captivity.

Another census was taken again after 38 years in the wilderness. But because of their sin, because of their murmuring, because of their not obeying God, they were not multiplied.

All those over the age of 20 years of age died in the wilderness. And so the numbers were virtually the same. And there were other censuses throughout the world.

But whenever the Lord asked for a census, there was always a cost to the people. When they were numbered, everyone had to bring half a shekel.

Man, woman, child, rich, poor, all gave the same amount. And why do they have to give this amount? To remind them that they were about people.

[16:05] God had purchased them. God would purchase them also in Christ Jesus. But they were about people. They were redeemed people. And this memorial in their numbering, when they even came up to the temple, was a remembrance to them, the same as the Lord's Supper is to us.

When they went to the temple, it was a remembrance to them that they were about people, that they were God's people, that they belonged to God.

God seemed to say, these are my people. No king or no ruler is to be counted as owning you, but only God.

God shall count as redeemed. God shall number his elect. And even the Lamb's Book of Life is only to be read by the one who bought his people and those of us whose names are there written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Now, according to the text here, we are told that there is to be a day when a great census will be taken in God's church.

[17 : 22] May it please God that all of us here this morning will be written in the Lamb's Book of Life. All of us here today will know what it means to be part of that great multitude without number of every people and kindred and tribe and nation.

When time shall be no more and the Lord Jesus Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven, then the Lord shall drive up his people.

Then the kingdom shall be complete. Then all those whom the Father has given to his Son shall be brought into the kingdom and his kingdom shall be complete.

What's going to be written in that book? It's going to be a very personal book about how we've lived what we've done. Obviously we are men and women of faith if our names are in that book.

But also there's recorded in there the works that we have done whether we have done good or whether we've done evil. And we shall be judged out of that book for those who are the Lord's we shall be forgiven we shall be brought to know the forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus.

[18 : 45] There's perhaps no truth which needs to be declared more than the truth that nothing but personal obedience and personal godliness is going to be of any use to us whatsoever.

If we trace back our ancestry in any way to the apostles or even to Mary the mother of the Lord herself is going to do us no good whatsoever.

It doesn't matter if our parents or grandparents or great-grandparents or elders or godly men and women in the churches to which we belong. It is of no use to us whatsoever.

We can make no boast of it. We can have no use of there being in any way saved by Christ. It has to be something very individual.

We must each one of ourselves stand before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil.

[19 : 55] But if we're in Christ Jesus we'll hear these words come ye blessed of my father inherit the joy and enter into the joy of the Lord.

Often in war and even today on the streets and cities of the land in which we inhabit the innocent die with the wicked.

But at the last day evil shall receive evil and the good shall receive good. The wheat and the tares shall be separated and the angels of the Lord shall come and separate the good into barns into God's presence and the evil shall be cast into the lake of fire and be burnt.

The great question which the Lord shall ask in that day is was this man born there?

Was this man ever called from darkness to light from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's own dear son? The heart has been changed from a heart of stone of unbelief and hardness to a heart of flesh to a heart of love and kindness.

[21 : 27] Have the eyes been opened? Have the ears been unstopped? Or are we just the way we were the first time we were brought to hear the gospel? If not, if our hearts have not been changed, if our desires have not been brought into conformity with God, if our hearts have not been brought to love Christ, when the role is called up yonder, our names will not be there.

the most important thing for you and for me today is that is to know that when the Lord writes up his people, it shall be said of you and of me that this man born is theirs.

Whose names then will be found when the Lord writes up his people? No one can really know the answer of that question.

It's a thing that John Newton wanted to know, am I his or am I no? That's the thing I want to know. I think it's every one of the Lord's people goes through seasons when they have these times when they are desperately anxious to know for certain.

And yet we go on in faith, the just shall live by faith, believing that the Lord has called us, believing that the Lord has changed us, changed our hearts, has called us from darkness to light, and brought us to know the joy that is in Christ Jesus.

[23 : 09] Jesus. And yet we know some will not be there. Those perhaps who come to church with the idea of thinking that because we come to church we are being respectable and acceptable in the communities in which we live.

You have a name that is alive, but really you are dead. What the Lord called whitewashed sepulchers.

It's one thing to have the respect of the church, and something totally different to have the respect of God. One of the things that happens when people come for baptism, especially those perhaps who are not members, is that they come for baptism seeking acceptance by the session as a mark

of respectability, and that if they're not, it's a mark of shame.

Surely the greatest desire for any of us is whether we find acceptance with God. Whether as we come, it's not that we don't gain acceptance with the people around us or the church in which we belong, but we find acceptance with God in Christ Jesus, that he is the one whose name we call upon, he's the one whom we look to, and he's the one who is to be our hope and our joy and our crown.

See, God can read the secret things of our heart. Our names might be in a church register on a communion roll, but except we are born again, they won't be found on the roll that God has.

[25 : 16] One of the most solemn words to ministers, elders, all those who are in perhaps office in the church, is examine yourself.

God's love. Because having preached the gospel to others, perhaps we ourselves shall be cast away.

And so all of us, we are members or elders or ministers, let us examine ourselves to see where we are on life's journey, whether our lives are in accordance with God's word, whether we are going on in the strength and the power of God, or whether we are going on in our own strength.

Then again, there are others whose names will not be in the book of life, those who are hearers of the word. Remember what James in his epistle reminds us, that faith is more than just believing. Evil, the devils believe, and tremble. And he gives the example of Rahab, Rahab the harlot, who believed and then did something with what she believed.

[26 : 36] She saved the spies. And so we also are not to be mere hearers of the word only. But how many of us, I wonder, could be described as mere hearers of the word only and not doers of it?

how many of us just simply come to church to ease our own consciousness? If we go through the motions, we come to church, we come twice on the Lord's Day perhaps, and even perhaps once midweek, and we think, that's okay, I'm in the right place, I'm doing what I should be doing.

And this psalm, as well as reminding us about God's being a mystery God, a God who wants people to be saved, doesn't want any to perish. It's also asking us the question, are we in the right place?

Is our heart right with God? Are we doing what the scriptures encourages us to do? Remember the Lord in, I think it's the Gospel of Luke, when he talks about those who are coming to him and saying, Lord, Lord, and did we not eat with you?

Did we not do many things in your name? And he'll say, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. Because they are doing all these things, and yet they're doing them for their own glory, for their own benefit, for their own bounty.

[28 : 05] Not God's glory, not God's glory towards all those whom he calls. angels. There's no doubt that we should be thankful for the many who are willing to listen to God's word.

and as I come into the church today I was rejoiced to see the church so full as I said I haven't seen the church so full in all the times I've been here I'm rejoiced to see the church so full but I have to ask the question of you as I have to ask the question of myself am I only a hearer of God's word even as I speak the gospel am I only hearer of God's word or am I actually a doer of it am I going out with the word am I speaking it to my neighbour am I encouraging my family to grow up in the knowledge and discipline of the Lord do we engage in family worship as a family altar something alive and real in our homes and in our communities to be a hearer only and not a believer will involve no salvation remember again the Lord Jesus Christ in that same part of the gospel of Luke or the gospel of Matthew also the Sermon on the Mount he says the same story about the man who built his house upon a rock and a man who built his house upon sand if you know these things wise are you if you do them if the man who built his house upon a rock his house his future was secure it was firm because that future was built on the rock in spiritual terms it's built on the scriptures it's built on what the Lord has said what the Lord has directed us the man who built his house his future on sand is someone who interprets the Bible in his own way who thinks that by perhaps living upright and a moral and a sociable life that's all that's required keeping the commandments in word but not in spirit we all know the ten commandments but how often do we think about what is required and what is forbidden that is revealed to us in again in the children's catechism as we go on in our lives the longer we go on the more we seem to fall short if we are believers in God's word that's what the word does to us it searches us it reveals to us where we are falling short it reveals to us where we are going wrong so may it be that each one of us will build for the future on the rock that is

Christ Jesus to have the seed sown week by week and to bear no fruit is a solemn thing to sit in church pews week after week some perhaps of you here today ten twenty years or more and still making no profession still halting between two opinions still on the outside without comfort without hope for the world to come that's surely no place for any of us here this morning to be if we have not received the word of God into our hearts and through the grace of God have been brought to see the mercy in Christ Jesus that will tend not to salvation but to a lost eternity hundreds perhaps even thousands of church goers think as if in their place in their pew on the Lord's day that's all that's expected of them but if you're not coming to hear the gospel if you're not rejoicing in the plan of salvation if your heart is not being warmed by the gospel and your desire to Christ not being increased as you hear that gospel then what do we think is expected of us it is simply a mark in the attendance book a place here where our seat is known to be let's not come and listen carelessly let's come and listen with desire desire for our hearts to be warmed for our knowledge to be increased and our love to embrace

Jesus Christ as he has offered to us in the gospel in the same way as your love increases as you come to know your family your children and your spouse more and more that's what's asked of us that our love for Christ would increase might be seen in our lives and in the way that we live in the way that we relate to him so whose names will be found there when we're called on to complete a census only those who actually live with us overnight their names alone are written in that census forms and that's the way it'll be at the last great census that the Lord takes when he writes up our names and records and registers the people in his book the name of every soul that ever believed in the Lord

Jesus Christ and rested upon him alone for salvation that name will be there whoever fled to the cross of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and for life everlasting that name shall be there whoever stretched out their hand to touch the hem of the garment of Christ that hem of blessing that name shall be there we're told not many after the flesh will be there not many mighty not many noble are chosen but God has chosen the poor of this world preaching faith to be heirs of his kingdom the weakest doubting saint will be there the one whose faith is weak and trembling whose lisping stammering tongue perhaps can't find the words to say that saint will be there is there everyone who's ever believed in the name of

[35 : 24] Christ though their spiritual life might be as a smoking flax that's almost dying out they shall find their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life so what think you of Christ whose son is he whose saviour is he is he your Lord is he your God is he the one in whom you place your trust is he your only help is he your only hope as we look at ourselves surely none of us can hope to stand before the judgment seat in any strength in ourselves it's only in Christ it's only in his finished work it's only his love towards sinners for each and every one of us are only sinners saved by grace none of us are able to boast of anything in ourselves when

God writes up the people it shall be said this man was born in her may the Lord rejoice in that time when the Lord returns to this earth with all the angels of heaven and there shall be the sound of the trumpet and a mighty shout that in Christ shall rise first and those who are alive shall be gathered up together with them in the air.

May the Lord then bless these thoughts to us. We will conclude then our service singing to God's praise in Psalm 87. Psalm 87.

Find that on page 115. On Jerusalem's holy mountain he has found it as a boat.

More than all of Jacob's dwellings, Zion's gates are dear to God. The whole psalm to God's praise. Standing to sing.

[37 : 46] On Jerusalem's holy mountain he has found it as a boat.

More than all of Jacob's dwellings, Zion's gates are dear to God.

Glorious things of you are spoken, Zion's city of the Lord.

Many drawn from all the nations, such a people I report.

I will name as those who know me, Egypt and Babylon.

[38 : 47] Till this time along with his sight, I will come as Zion born.

Yes, it will be said of Zion, A stand that one here belongs.

And on earth the highest blessing Will descend and make her strong.

Born in Zion God will enter in the people's register.

They will sing as they make music. All my fountains are in earth.

[39 : 48] And now may grace, mercy and peace. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Rest on you and abide in you now and always.

Amen.