

Greater Love of God

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[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's help, I'd like us to turn a little time this afternoon to words that we have read in the letter to the Hebrews and chapter 13.

Hebrews chapter 13. And again I'm reading here from the authorised version.

As you probably understand, even when I'm reading another version I find myself making mistakes in the reading because the authorised version is in my mind.

So please bear with me on that. We're going to read from verse 19. I beseech you rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight.

[1 : 08] Through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Amen. I remember a number of years ago, there was a preacher who, in every sermon he preached, and I might be guilty of many of these things myself, in every sermon he preached, he always used the biblical phrase, What think ye of Christ?

And it's certainly not a question that should be very far from any one of us, considering that we are so privileged as people to have received something of which we have been undeserving.

We know, and the word of God reminds us, however horrible we may think it to be, we were all hell-deserving sinners.

But grace overcame, mercy overcame. The love of God showed to us a different way than the one that we were on.

In fact, when you read the introduction to the chapter we read in Isaiah 53, every one of us, I'm sure, can identify with the sentiments that are expressed there.

[2 : 31] For there was a time, however much we might have given credence to a respectability in our lives, even in terms of church-going.

For a long time, there was no beauty in Christ that we should desire him. And I'm sure many of us can say that.

Oh, we had maybe a respectable approach. And maybe that is the case for some here. I don't know. But you know, and God knows.

Are you, in your life, even as an attender upon the means of grace, someone who wants to be respectable and acceptable in the community and have a veneer of religiosity about us.

Please, these statements are not meant to offend. But if in anything, that they would draw attention to the realization, maybe we need to think about this.

[3 : 36] Maybe we need to answer the question, what do I really think of Christ? Because there is one sure thing, as long as we are outside of him, there is no beauty in him that we should desire him.

But what a privilege it is, is it not, to find ourselves today in the Saturday prior to a communion, to have that grace of faith abounding in us, those of us, as we've already said, who are held deserving.

We have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ. And our esteem of Christ is not yet, and it's not yet what maybe it should be. We know that.

None of us here can say that I have reached a zenith point in my Christian life. I can go no further. Of course we can. There is much more that we can do in terms of the cause of Christ and the lives of each and every one of us.

But of course that is why we have the word of God. A lamp to our feet. It is a light unto our path. It shows us the way. We have been brought into the way through the blood of the everlasting covenant.

[4 : 56] Christ has shown to us in himself that he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the great shepherd of the sheep. He is the one who is consistently watching over and guarding his people, interceding for them, even when we are in the depths maybe of despair at times.

And the writer to the Hebrews, as he does even from the very beginning of this letter, and especially when you think of what chapter 2 is saying, you know, we have a great cloud of witnesses around us.

And we have a testimony to bear. And their testimony must demonstrate surely what I really think of Jesus. Not what I say, but what I do.

Or not what I say only, but what I do. Yes, we can say, as with Peter, I believe thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Yes, we can say that, but there may be nothing more than the theological statement. What we want in these lives of ours as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

[6 : 21] We spend our time this side of eternity doing all kinds of things. they might have a great legitimacy about them in the community, in our families, and so on.

But the one excellent thing is maybe very often taken in the second place. And we are not doing always what Christ wants us to do. But maybe what we need is to have a heightened anticipation of who this God is and whom we believe.

Who is this Christ? Who is the Saviour who loved us and who gave himself for us? Who is he? The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Well, if, as Isaiah says, there was a time when we had no esteem of Christ. Where are we now?

I say that not in any way to put doubt in people's minds, but to encourage you again to remember what Jesus is calling upon us to do. Always to remember him.

[7 : 36] To remember him not just at the communion season, but to remember at all times who he is. And these words of our text, now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant.

How great is Christ to you and to me, the great shepherd of the sheep, the one whom the psalmist speaks of prophetically in those very familiar words of Psalm 23, that for him, whatever might have been his vocational duties in this world, they were speaking to him with regard to his own need as an individual.

He might have been the shepherd of his father's flock, but who was his shepherd? Who was the one that in his estimation was the greater of all?

The Lord is my shepherd, I not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside the still waters, He restores my song, He leads me to the path of righteousness for his main Savior.

Who is this Christ, the Savior of the world, and as he writes if you say, the great shepherd of the sheep? I want to think of a few things with respect to Christ and our appreciation of him and how that appreciation ought to heighten as we journey in the road of faith.

[9 : 21] We should not be the same today as we were yesterday. Increase us in our faith is the word of Scripture. Scripture.

But more than that, surely each and every one of us wants to become more like unto him. That, as we read, we may die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

Let not of the sin that so often overtakes us be so detrimental to us that we stumble and we fall.

he is the great shepherd of the sheep. In what respect? How do you see Christ this afternoon prior to communion Sabbath?

If we know what Scripture says, but what I'm interested in is what do we think? What do we believe? How are we to anticipate tomorrow with regard to the faith, the very gift of faith that has been given to us?

[10 : 31] Christ is love person on height. He loved me, says the Apostle Paul. He loved me and he gave himself for me. When Paul penned these words, was it just a theological treatise that he was expressing?

Was it not something that came, yes, by the Spirit, of course, but it was something that penetrated his heart so deeply that he knew at least some measure of what of his love was to him a wretched sinner, deserving only of God's wrath and cares?

Paul never saw anything of the evidence of love in this world, at least not to the extent as he found it in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, we have loves. There are things that we love in this world, things that we cherish in this world, and things, yes, that we might even covet, that are legitimate to covet, things that are to our spiritual and eternal well-being.

But nothing speaks so clearly to us than the love for Christ has loved us. Christ. He loved me, says the apostle, and he gave himself for me.

[11 : 57] He is the manifestation of love. He is the love for with. All mankind has been loved.

But more than that surely is this. It's not just that in some distant past, two thousand years ago, the evidence of this man whom God sent into this world, this eternal son who was sent into this world to redeem a people to himself.

It's not something that is just locked in history, is it? Of course it's not. The love of Christ is working in the hearts of the children of man down through the generations and continues to do so.

Maybe even in somebody's heart this day. Maybe you never thought about it. But the great love of Christ in action, what does he do?

What is he saying to you and to me with regard to this action of love? Last evening we were contemplating considering how Paul appreciated that in terms of himself as well as the Ephesians.

[13 : 11] Great love in action. Great love for God has loved us. As I have said and we compute ourselves time and time again on this whole subject.

The love for what Christ has loved us is unbathomable. We can't reach the fullness of its depths or reach its heights.

But we can appreciate by faith something of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. And at that level surely is this that we see the Lord Jesus Christ as that great shepherd of the sheep who loved us unsinkly.

To use a word unequivocally. We and I have problems with love haven't we? there's always got to be some kind of almost human reasoning behind it or some human feeling behind it.

But when you consider that with the love that is in Christ Jesus comes about we who were deserving of nothing and yet he loved us.

[14 : 25] He loved us so much that he gave himself for us. Oh we as the prophet says all we like sheep have gone astray we have turned every one to his own way but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

What a picture. How would he paint that picture? Some people might have a gift of painting but how could anyone ever paint a picture depicting that same?

He laid it upon him the iniquity of us all. Well Christ is the great shepherd of the sheep and he is the great shepherd of the sheep because as we will remember tomorrow he laid down his life he shed his blood for the remission of sin.

What are you hanging on to? What am I hanging on to? What am I dependent upon? Is there something yet in me that I can do to be able to get me acceptable before Christ?

We must believe in the blood. That's all we're called upon to do. To believe in the blood of the everlasting covenant. Why? Because the word of God says so.

[15 : 50] I hope you don't mind me going back and some of your quotes here that remember some of the things that I said about it. But when you contemplate the very crucifixion of Christ it was back in 2012 I was here one time.

But when you contemplate the crucifixion of Christ you ask yourself all over the depth of Christ what does it mean? To the world it means nothing.

It just seems a silly kind of activity a historical account of something of a botched activity that looked on 2000 years ago. But to the believer in Christ what is it?

Well the manner of his death as Isaiah's prophecies tells us. You know with all the pain, with all the suffering, even the experience without the ground. What was it?

An account of it was an account of your sin and mine. And that great shepherd of the sheep. Yes, he laid down his life a ransom for his people.

[16 : 56] In Romans chapter 4 and verse 25 we are told in these words of the apostle Paul who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification.

It's a thought, isn't it? That the sinless one, the one who knew no sin, became a sin for us. The one who is the righteous one, the one who is the justified of us all.

He became all of those things. Why? Because he loved us. It's always good to reflect, is it not, on the announcement of John the Baptist.

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. As I think of Christ in all his greatness, in all his power and all his glory, do I think of him in that sense, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

What great action of love is presented to us? In fact, it is the power of love. Is that not what Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 9?

[18 : 17] He says this, For God is that the power of Christ may rest upon me. What a thirsty apostle had that he might have more and more of Christ living in him.

Yes, the crucifixion of Christ. Christ, its cause, as you and I have to admit to it, its cause was sin, your sin and mine.

Yet God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. What a blessing that is to those who are going to come to the table for the first time.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

What an embrace! Every single one of us, especially those who have come to faith in recent times, who have embraced the Lord Jesus Christ and experienced the embracing of Christ.

[19 : 39] Oh yes, in this world, every one of us have experienced disappointments, but we are sure of this, in the kingdom of Christ, under the great shepherd of the sheep, there will never be a disappointment, but his promise has always been that he will not leave us, he will never forsake us.

If the cause of the sufferings of Christ is our sin, and as I've suggested its power was love, as we said last night, the basis of it all is grace.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me that once was lost that now I found, was blind, but now I see.

What does it mean for you and for me as we approach the communion Sabbath morning, to look upon Christ as the great shepherd of the sheep? It is surely this, that the way that the shepherd deals with us is not to deal and to take us into places that will do us harm, it's the world that will do that.

John chapter 10, oh yes, the devil has got plenty of harvets and he will want to drag people into all kinds of avenues that will be of great harm to them in this world and the world to come, but not Jesus.

[21 : 21] He is the great shepherd of the sheep. he won't leave them, he won't forsake them, he won't leave them to their own devices after all.

If for David, sitting out in an evening, many an evening, looking after his father's sheep, because of the dangers of the marauding animals that were around, lions or bears or whatever, how much more the consistency of Christ upon his own people, the great shepherd of the sheep.

Yes, we know he will lead us into green pastures. He will lead us and we will never be far from him. What does he do?

He goes before us, he breaks up the way. He shows us the dangers and the pitfalls so in order that we might not fall into them.

I'm not going to say this for the benefit of your own minister, but it's a very interesting illustration for those of us who have called into ministry.

[22 : 34] I remember one of our professors, I don't mind what he was named, he was Prince of Grail, and he gave advice to us all, I'm sure he's listening to me now, he's waking up, he gave advice to us all that he said, Luke, he said, when you are leaving the flock, go before them, and don't go far ahead of them, keep them, they'll be in noticeable distance, but don't do what many of the highly shepherds might have done, and I apologise to any shepherds you just now, I'm making a comment, it's going to be an offence, but what principle Grail said, you don't go behind the people and drive them, you take them with you, the highly shepherd was very used to driving the sheep and taking a couple of dogs with them, you know, just nipping them at their heels and so on, the shepherd that we have, is the one who goes before us breaking up the way, the great shepherd of the sheep who will not lead nor forsake us, he will not drive a wedge between any one of us, in fact, the whole purpose of it is to draw us together, and you read the psalmary psalm beginning again, psalm 7, gave us a picture of the gathering of the

Lord's people, is there not? For the Lord Jesus Christ, what he loves above everything, as may mean something of what the beginning of this chapter says to us, let brotherly love continue.

And if we are all identified as the sheep that belong to Christ, who are very dependent upon Christ, and sure dependence upon him by not going our own way, or thinking we can do it all ourselves, we can do nothing ourselves.

But I want to say just by a little aside here, and I am sure you have heard it time and time again from the minister, and especially as you approach a communion season, the Lord wants you to make that commitment, to follow his word and his command, and if you have a amount of love of Christ to your heart, then don't be disobedient, don't stay away from the table because of human difficulties.

Remember, the great shepherd of the sheep overcomes everything, does not. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

[25 : 25] He knows what the harving will do, he knows the tempter that you have to contend with, but don't let the tempter be the one. who is going to win, even today.

But live in obedience, and if you love Christ, then make that profession. The illustration I will leave you with is the woman of Samaria, and she is a good example to all.

The Lord Jesus Christ came into her path, he spoke to her, he addressed many things to her, things that maybe other people would not dare. She wasn't looked upon as someone who was respectable at all.

She probably thought, you know, as she said, the Jews had no kings for the Samaritans. But what is that to Christ? All he is concerned about is a sin that need of salvation.

salvation. And as the Lord began to unravel that woman's life in front of her, to the extent that she had no answer brought in, maybe you are trying to give all kinds of answers against Christ as to why you should not be in obedience.

[26 : 45] She submitted. But what does she do? She does the only thing you can do, and that is testify. to the grace of God that has come into your heart.

See what she does? She goes to these people, these men with whom she had all her abusive dealings with, and she tells them, and I love the expression, come.

You all must feel the empathy in her voice. Come. See a man that told me all things that ever I did. It's not this to Christ.

Oh, yes, I'm sure there were times when she was in fear and trembling. But to realize this Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, who was not willing that any sheep perished, that this should also come to acknowledge the truth.

Would you not like, if you were just sitting on the edge, unsure, would you not like that Christ would come even now, speak to your heart and say, come, come today, show forth who you are and who you serve.

[28 : 03] now the God of priests is brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work.

And that's all. I'm going to finish with that. what he is saying here, the apostle is saying, what the writer of Hebrews is saying to you is this, he wants if you are one of Christ, to walk in his way, to look unto Jesus, the author and the finisher or perfecter of our faith, hope for the joy that was set before him, endure the cross, despising the same.

Yes, he is worth a worth of grace in your heart, but it's not, the day that you committed your life to Christ. Did it stop the day that he made that change in your life?

No, it didn't. It continues. Yes, sanctifying influence of the very presence of Christ in the life of the believer.

Yes, showing forth whose we are and whom we serve. Make you perfect in every good work to do his will. After all, if the one in whom we believe did this father's will, as was prophesied in the Sabbath, he sang, to do thy will I take delight, what greater action could there be in response to the great shepherd of the sheep, to do his will, what he wants us to do, come, take, eat.

[29 : 46] this is my body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me. Take the cup, which is the New Testament in my blood, this do as often as you can, in remembrance of me, but as often as you eat of this bread interest, this cup, you do show forth the Lord's hand, to be calm.

there will never be a commandment that will ever come across your mind, your heart, your soul with a stranger than this, to do the will of Christ because to do anything else is a matter of love.

Shall we pray? Holy parable and blessed God, thou art to the great shepherd of the sheep. And we do thank thee, O Lord, that thou hast brought us into this fold.

We thank thee for the protective power that thou dost lay around us. We thank thee for the assurance that we have that thou wilt never leave us nor forsake us, that thou wilt perform even to the very end that which thou hast begun in us.

We do not say these things because we are deserving of them, but we know that thy word is true, and everyone that comes to Jesus will have no need to be afraid, but he will continue to be with them and be a strength and a stay to them.

[31 : 20] O Lord, bless all thy people then in this time of preparation and whatever anxieties might be in the hearts of any one of us, whatever sorrows and sadnesses we bear, help us as Jesus says, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I will need and lower your heart. Where could we find greater rest and oasis than at the Lord's table?

Go before us then, forgiving all things, lovingness in Jesus. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing in the words of Psalm number 80.

Psalm 80 and singing from verse 1 to verse 3. He is your shepherd like a flock, thou didst Joseph guide.

Shine forth, O thou that dost abide between the cherubims abide. In Ephraim's and Benjamins and in Manasse's sight, O come for our salvation, stir up thy strength and might.

[32 : 45] Turn us again, O Lord our God, and upon us thou safe, to make thy countenance to shine, and so we shall be safe.

These words then of Psalm 80, beginning with the Psalm, here is your shepherd like a flock. Here is Israel shepherd like a flock, thou, thou, thou, thou, thou, thou, thou, thou, thou, thou, thou, in cherubim's Ephraim's abide.

In Ephraim's and Benjamin's and in Manasseh's side.

O come for our salvation, stir up thy strength and might.

Turn us again, O Lord our God, and upon us part save to make thy countenance, to shine, and so we shall be saved.

[34 : 41] And now with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Father, the fellowship and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, rest upon and remain with you, and with all the Israel of God, both now and always.

Amen.