

## **“Knowing God: Our Hope in 2021”**

3 January 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call To Worship**

**Hymn of Preparation:** IPH 125 Lord Of The Years

**Prayers of Adoration & Confession:** Ray Speer

**Reading:** Psalm 33

### **Sermon:**

[photo of Greyfriars Bobby] Who is this? This Skye terrier named Bobby is famous for the remarkable story of enduring friendship he forged with a tenderhearted shepherd, simply known as Old Jock - a friendship unbroken even by the kindly old man's death as Bobby kept vigil by his grave for 14 years. It moves us emotionally; it's heartwarming! Their friendship meant something; it helped them both. It was a good thing, a friendship of **unfailing love**, worthy even of a film.

God desires that those who know Him would know the reality of His unfailing love for them, and Psalm 33 teaches us how to live in consideration of His love. Verses 5, 18, and 22 speak of God's unfailing love, a covenant love - promised, strong, eternal, unbreakable. Psalm 33 sets out how we should live because we are loved faithfully by God and it is an excellent place to start 2021! The reality of this truth makes a difference in how we live! The psalmist does this by writing a song of praise. Let us explore what he wrote.

#### **I. Sing joyfully to the LORD (v.1-3)**

During the previous lockdowns, when I wrote letters to you each week, we shared with each other songs that helped us. The writer of this sacred song says a lot about the worship of God in song. It is to be joyful; it's a fitting and good thing to do; the use of instruments is helpful and they should be played skilfully; our praise should be exuberant, even loud.

It is tempting to ignore this call, but I urge us not to. Here is a strong, biblical command to make time every day to sing to God in praise. We thank God for songwriters, musicians and singers, and for the wonder of technology which allows us through many mediums to have access to joyful songs about God played skilfully and with great gusto. If you want to make a New Year's resolution, here is one from the pages of Scripture: sing joyfully to the Lord. Do it in your heart at least once a day.

Not being able to sing in our church services is a severe loss as Christians; we long for the time when we can do so safely. When the restrictions are lifted, I hope we can meet to have an evening or week of praise, a celebration of God and His unfailing love (v.1).

#### **A. God's Word (v.4-9)**

One Christmas, I received a book called *The World's Greatest Speeches*, which acknowledged the way that words spoken can change circumstances. Most of us think of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his "I Have A Dream" speech; not so well known is Malala Yousafzai who, having been shot by Taliban, spoke up for women's

education. The Bible speaks of God as the Word and v.4-9 are in praise of His words, character and creative ability.

The psalmist is influenced by the stories from his past. He remembers the creation story recorded in Genesis, which tells of God gathering the waters together into one place and calling it sea. He recalls the story of the exodus, of God piling the water of the Red Sea in a heap for the salvation of the Israelites and the destruction of their enemies. He's also aware of the amazing bounty of water stored in the earth on which his people depended as they traversed the wilderness, and which sustains them as they now live in the Promised Land. Creation pours forth testimony about the character, and above all about the unfailing love, of God for all the people of the world, that they might revere Him. A star-filled sky on a warm evening (v.6) is awesome, and it brings reverence and respect for its Creator. Those stories remind the psalmist that God is right, true, faithful in everything, just and loving in His character (v.4-5). Meditating on God as Creator and on His character leads to the response in v.8: *"Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere Him"*.

Our second New Year's resolution, following the lead of the psalmist, is to read the Word of God and revere the Word of God. I take it as a given that each of us who know God as Saviour and Lord are reading the Bible each day personally.

- One way of being encouraged is by reading and thinking through what the Word of God says with others. 3D groups are designed to help each of us develop prayerful relationships while digging deeper into God's word and discussing how it impacts the way we live. They are led by people like you who are humbling asking God to help them live well for Jesus. The Word of God is great, worth study and consideration.
- Carefully consider creation and appreciate that it speaks of God's unfailing love. A positive about the current restrictions is that we've all been more appreciative of nature and our local environment. Carefully consider the creation around us, explore, and in doing so, fear and revere the Lord.

## **B. God's Plan (v.10-12)**

These verses tell us that God controls history. Everything that the governments of nations do is subject to divine restraint (v.10) and He brings His plan to bear on nations. His overarching purpose is always accomplished (v.11) and is worth exploring in the context of nation, city and Church (v.12). The psalmist speaks of the nation, and by that he means Israel, because he goes on to say, "the people He chose for His inheritance." The Old Testament is clear that this is Israel (Ex 19:5). God's great plan and His intention was to bless Israel. He chose a people for Himself and blessed them so that they would be a blessing. It was a covenant promise given to Abraham and fulfilled when they as a nation obeyed God.

We apply the truth of this verse to the Church, because she is the visible kingdom of God and the Church (God's people) is blessed when God is our God and we live in obedience to His word. It is vital that we in church understand the purpose of God to bless us so that we can be a blessing to others. His plans do not fail and in that we have absolute confidence.

Yet this reassurance is given in the context of living within and surrounded by other nations. As we rethink post-Covid what church and mission for us look like, we can take heart that God desires to bless all nations through the Church. It is this truth that encourages us, as we have opportunity, to share the good news of Jesus and be a voice in the public square - to speak for and uphold the ways of the Lord, because we believe them to be given by God, whose character is perfect, who creates and loves unfailingly, who knows what is best for those He created. Here then is a third New Year's resolution, that we will pray about how we can engage as a city centre church with the area around us and as individuals where we work, live and play. God's plans stand firm, they are secure and good, and we joyfully work them out in the Church and His world. I encourage us all to pray and think through what plans and opportunities God has for us in 2021, that we might seek the blessing of God and be a blessing to others.

### **C. God's Vision (Omniscience) (v.13-19)**

It is exceedingly difficult to live life today unseen. We leave behind a digital trace when we travel, spend money, and talk on the phone. Even more unnerving is that tech giants try to influence our lives (if we allow it), from what we might buy to how we might vote. There is an incredible level of scrutiny! Verses 13-15 outline a level of knowledge and insight of us way beyond that and v.15 is an incredible verse: *"He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do"*. That is all-encompassing, perfect scrutiny.

Of course, the next question we should ask is, "Is the One who scrutinises for us or against us? Does He want to know us in order to harm us or protect us?" A subsequent question is, "Does He have power to do either of these?" The psalmist has in mind the story of the Exodus and he is firmly of the belief that a superpower like Egypt, with an army of thousands and powerful horses, has no power in contrast to God, as the story of the crossing of the Red Sea wonderfully demonstrated. Verses 18-19 praise the strength of the LORD, His ability to save and His deep desire to do so, because of His covenant, unfailing love.

The psalmist is remembering the Exodus from Egypt and the provision of God for His people in the desert wilderness. Our hope is in the cross of the Lord Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. There we see His unfailing love and hold to that by faith. In the cross and the resurrection, we see and we believe in God's unfailing love and His saving power. God looks after His own in this world and He brings us into eternity through resurrection power (v.18-19).

God sees our hearts, He delivers from death and sustains in hard times those who fear Him, who hope in His unfailing love. Here is another challenge for our New Year's resolutions: simply hold to this belief, resisting the temptation to doubt God and walk away from Him. Hold to Him when enemies attack, when things do not appear to be working out in our favour (in famine or in a pandemic); trust that though we may never fully know what God is doing in us and among us, God sees, God loves, He will deliver and give us life.

## II. Wait In Hope (v.20-22)

The implication for those who fear Him and hope in His unfailing love is spoken of in the conclusion (v.20-22). *"We wait in hope for the LORD, He is our help and our shield. In Him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in His holy name. May Your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in You."*

Psalms 33 teaches us about God as Creator, telling us of His wonderful character and His covenant of unfailing love with us. So, what will we do with God? These final verses give us plenty of options - perseverance, hope, help, joy and praise, coming to Him in prayer. Notice that *He* is the focus: we wait in hope for *the LORD*, *He* is our help, in *Him* our hearts rejoice, we trust in *His* holy name and we pray to *Him*, we ask of *Him*. This psalm invites relationship, invites acknowledgement of God in our lives, interaction, listening, understanding, waiting, trusting, truly engaging with Him.

Having read and considered this psalm, I am sure, like me, you are aware of not trusting God or doubting Him. You have found other things to distract, other comforts, other idols or gods to turn to. Let us start by acknowledging this in repentance, admitting to God that we have not waited for Him, or that our ingenuity, money, or fitness have been our help, or that we have allowed ourselves to be joyless, ungrateful, burdened by life and all its attendant difficulties, particularly because of Covid. "Sorry Lord, I haven't waited in hope, I haven't rejoiced, I haven't trusted in You, but sought comfort in other things." Having reminded ourselves of God's unfailing love, we approach with hope of forgiveness, of cleansing, of a fresh start.

So, will we commit to these resolutions? Will we regularly:

**Praise God!** Rejoice in Him because of His character. He is trustworthy, holy, transcendent, separated and other, above and beyond, greater and better, worthy of our trust.

**Read our Bibles** to hear from God, to understand life, to gain instruction, to find the truth, to know God and His Holy name. Here are some practical things you could do!

- Read this psalm every day this week and meditate on the truths about God and the instructions given to us by the psalmist in consideration of these truths.
- Follow a Bible reading plan.
- Become part of a 3D group so you can share with others about your life and relationship with God.
- Visit the ARPC website and work through the material found there - questions, talks, links.
- Read a book on an issue that you want to know, "What does God think about that?"

**Explore creation.**

**Pray** that we would be a blessing to others and join in the corporate church prayer times.

**Hope** and trust in God in all difficulties, realising that God is unfailing in His love.

The psalmist commends God to us, encouraging us to joyfully put our trust in Him in 2021 with hope in His unfailing love. Knowing God is our hope in 2021.

**Praise:** Magnificent, Marvellous, Matchless Love

**Prayers for Others:** Rev. Sam Mawhinney

**Announcements**

**Closing Hymn:** All Glory Be To Christ

**Benediction:** May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all evermore. Amen.

**Discussion & Application:**

What gives you hope as you look forward to 2021? What gives us hope?

What does Psalm 33 teach us about God? How can knowing God give us hope?

What difference or change does this knowledge of God encourage you toward personally in the year ahead?

What difference or change does this knowledge of God encourage us toward corporately in the year ahead?