

Our Help

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[0 : 0 0] Now, some of you may have read in the papers this week about St Giles, one of our sister, cousin churches, round the corner just at the top of the Royal Mile Church of Scotland.

And you may have read that the Church of Scotland have a plan for the Presbytery of Edinburgh, which sadly includes the closing of 40 churches, not St Giles, but they are suggesting St Giles be taken from their possession and put into the hands of Scottish National Heritage or one of these organisations to look after it, because it's always a very expensive building to look after and they are struggling with some of these buildings and the responsibility of them.

I think it was online on the evening news that I saw that particular article. And of course, there's always comments, isn't there, after you have an article like that. And it's always fatal to look at the comments, isn't it?

It's a terrible thing, anything to look at the comments, because it always seems to draw the very worst out of everyone. But some of the, I mean, some of the comments were fine, but many of the comments were good riddance.

What a waste of time anyway. Religion is just a disaster. It's all rubbish. It's totally irrelevant. Who cares what happens to St Giles or to any other church for that matter. And that was a common theme in the comments that went down.

[1 : 2 6] This kind of disinterest and it's irrelevant rubbish. And I wonder if that is something that you hear quite a lot. Generally when maybe you say that you're a Christian or that you go to church or something's mentioned about Christianity.

It's something we hear a lot, isn't it? That it's a waste of time. It's just something from a past age. It's irrelevant, completely irrelevant.

And I imagine most people who don't have any knowledge of the Bible or Christianity will regard it as completely irrelevant to them.

I guess the challenge is for us who know a little bit more about the Bible and even some of us who profess to be Christians and say that we love Jesus Christ.

If that's still to a greater or lesser degree true of us that we find when we go to God's Word and the challenge of it and even maybe for some of the young people who are maybe feeling uncomfortable at the thought of doing a 12 series session on Christian sexuality might think, oh, that's awful or irrelevant.

[2 : 3 8] The Bible's teaching on sexuality is irrelevant today. It's not what we hear and it's old fashioned and it's out of date and irrelevant.

I think often that is because we don't go deep into God and into God's Word. We haven't wrestled with it.

We haven't sought to find it as not only a personal relationship with the living God, but also a fundamental philosophical foundation for our lives that is truth that is revealed.

We haven't worked at it, so we cast aside as being irrelevant. We haven't delved in it, so we think it has nothing to say to our experience. And it was interesting, wasn't it, on Wednesday evening for those of you who were there or who managed to hear the garbled message from Corey, not because he presented it in a garbled way, but because his Wi-Fi at home when he was giving it on screen wasn't that good.

He was talking about that in terms of anxiety that often the challenge is to take theology, that is the knowledge of God and apply that into our lives and allow it to mold and move and transform our understanding, the truth of this person, the living God, our loving Father.

[4 : 09] And this Psalm does it very well, and we're going to look at this Psalm. Because you may have read that Psalm and thought, this is kind of irrelevant. The Psalms generally speak about a nation a long time ago and thousands of years ago, and it doesn't seem to be terribly relevant.

But it's part of God's living Word, and we find as we work at it and as we wrestle with it, it is tremendously significant and relevant in our lives. Because we find that this Psalm, for example, silhouettes the Christian life.

So if you're a Christian today, you'll find that this Psalm silhouettes the kind of life that you have as a Christian. I'll explain a little bit what I mean by that in different ways. The first thing that helps, silhouettes our lives as Christians is that it's a journey of faith.

What's been spoken about here is about a journey of faith because this Psalm is entitled A Song of Ascent, and it's given the authors, given the song of David.

Now, the Psalms of Ascent are still in Book 5. Remember last week we started looking at Book 5, and we're looking at that today as well, Book 5.

[5 : 22] But the Song of Ascent is part of that. The ones we looked at last week were the, can you remember them, the Hallel Songs? That were the ones that were sung on the way up to the Passover. These are called the Song of Ascent, okay? Psalm 120, right through to Psalm 134.

And these were sung as the people went up the hill. They were the song as opposed to descent songs. They were ascent songs.

They were sung as they went up the hill towards Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was set on a hill. And they were sung generally as they were travelling and as they were going to three of the festivals that they were commanded to celebrate and worship by God.

Deuteronomy 16 and 16 tells us that, can we have that slide up? Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place you will choose. At the Festival on Leavenbread, the Passover, the Festival of Weeks, the Pentecost, and the Festival of Tabernacles.

There was three annual festivals that they went to. Passover we know was remembering the salvation that God had brought and taken them out of slavery in Egypt towards the Promised Land.

[6 : 33] Pentecost was celebrated 50 days later, probably in late May if March was the time of the Passover. And that was to celebrate the first harvest, the grain harvest. But also 50 days after the Passover was the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, when God gave the Ten Commandments.

And then the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated later on in the year in October, which spoke about God's provision both in the late harvest, but also Tabernacles, just another word for a tent or a dwelling place.

And it was remembering the time that they spent in the desert, the 40 years they spent in the desert when they were intense, they didn't have their own home. And so what they would do at the Feast of Tabernacles, they would all come out of their houses and they would live intense for a week and they would celebrate and they would be together and they would have a great time.

So these were great festivals, great celebrations, great time of worship. So the Tabernacle Festival remembered that time in the desert, but specifically remembered God's provision of what?

Food and drink, manna and water. Remember for the whole time God miraculously provided for them while they were in the desert. And so these songs of ascent were when all the people were together, going up to celebrate these festivals, it was a time of pilgrimage, a time of community and shared experiences, remembering God's covenant love, remembering what He'd done in the past as they went up to specifically celebrate and have these festivals together, shared memories.

[8 : 10] So it was a journey of faith. And that I'll speak a little bit of how that parallels with our lives in a minute. But also parallels or silhouettes of Christian life because it speaks about the reality of trouble as well, doesn't it?

Verse 2 of the Psalms says, if the Lord had not been on our side, when people rose up against us, then we would have been swallowed up alive. It's almost like if David's the author, it's almost like he's recalling David and Goliath type experiences because his people, the Israelites were always small.

I don't mean in size. I had to raise this up when Corrie's not preaching. But not small in size, but small in number.

All the nations, the great nations around them were always much bigger, much more significant, much better equipped in every way to survive. And it's like David and Goliath situations.

They had no chance on their own to be victorious, no chance to survive on their own. And so you've got these great natural pictures, the natural world he uses for pictures.

[9 : 18] They would have been swallowed alive. The flood would have swept them away. They would have been eaten by wild animals. They would have been entrapped, enslaved in a snare.

And it's just speaking about the trouble that they were facing, the destructive anger. It's like, you know, you see these nature programs of a whale just swallowing just shoals of fish alive.

It's just been, you know, they don't even have time to fight back. They don't have time to realize what's happening. Or we see the sweeping away of floods. You read again of the potential of a tsunami this week and the huge brutality of that or of raging rivers just, you know, ripping up buildings.

And the destructive power is spoken of here about being swept away by the torrent or the wild animals who, and the David Attenborough programs, we see as he speaks so gently and sweetly in his voice about this animal that's tearing another animal apart, quite naturally.

And it seems he speaks so sweetly about such a brutal and ugly event. And then there's the snare, the trap, the entangled web of the fowl-er, the one who's catching birds and keeping them in a trap, unable to get away.

[10 : 49] And that's the pictures, the everyday pictures that his people would have understood when he's recalling the trouble they faced spiritually. And the trouble they faced is a people in the world, God's people in the world.

And that was the world David lived in. They felt insignificant often, overwhelmed in a hostile environment, and both physically, I think, and spiritually.

So we see that silhouetting, and I'll come back to that briefly when we look at it for ourselves. But the third aspect of the Psalm is not just that we recognize the journey of faith and the reality of trouble, but also, obviously, the strong companionship of God with them, as it's revealed in this passage.

It's a call for God's people here. David's calling them to remember together the goodness of God if it had not been the Lord who is on our side.

The Lord is on their side. And then he finishes with our help is in the name of the Lord, Lord's on their side. The Lord is their helper. And it's this great call for this Old Testament group of people as they go up towards the festivals three times a year to memorize, to signpost, to be inspired, to celebrate, to eat and to drink and to worship, and to rest and to praise God together at these festivals.

[12 : 14] It was a time of relief and a time of release for them. A time, despite their weakness and feeling of helplessness, to know that he was committed for them, their friend on their side, setting them free, keeping them from being overwhelmed and destroyed, providing for them abundantly, both as he speaks in the Psalm and as they think of the festivals, what they're remembering, the Passover and the giving of the law and the manna and the water and God's provision for them, as well as victory over their enemies.

Remember the promised land was a land flowing with milk and honey, which they were promised. This is a recognition for them of the mercy of the living God of heaven and earth.

And all of it for them, visual reminders as they could think about these nature pictures as it were, remind them not only of their, as it was in the Old Testament, a physical deliverance because they were a nation together under God, but also the spiritual deliverance that they knew forgiveness of sin and the consequences of that, even if they couldn't fully understand and know how God would provide for them because Jesus hadn't come yet.

What David was saying, say it, say it Israel, say it again and again, you know, let Israel now say. It's just called to verbalize what they knew, to speak it, to talk about it, to talk about it together on the journey and as they go up to the festival together.

So that's the kind of, that's the Psalm as it was in its original context as it was given to God's people and it was sung at these times of hill climbing up towards Jerusalem.

[14 : 09] Great thing to do if you've got the breath to sing when you're going up a hill. You can do it next week when you're coming up the mound. But what's the broad application of a Psalm like this written so long ago into our own lives as Christians?

And have you begun to even link together the teaching of the Psalm as it was originally given to David and how as God's living word it still applies into our lives as we take it and recognize the themes from it and the truth from it that is more clearly laid out for us as we understand what the Christian life is and what Christ has done for us.

So the first thing I would say is that we too are travelers as Christians. One John 1 verse 7, can we have that text up?

I got you out there, harsha. One John 1 7, but if we walk in the light, we walk. So New Testament often describes the Christian life as a walk, as a journey.

As he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son purifies us from all sin. I know it's a bit of a cliché to talk about life as a journey, but it is really, isn't it?

[15 : 28] In many ways it is for all of us a journey. It's as a start, as a middle and it's got an end. And a lot of us don't want to think about the end. Some of us aren't even so keen to think about the middle.

And it is clearly a journey. And as Christians we're on a journey as well. You know, we became Christians, we're living the Christian life and we have a destination in God's presence.

We never stand still. Physically we don't stand still. In terms of our life where we're going, we're all a week older than we were last week.

Somehow you will have lost loved ones over this last week. And their journey has come in this life to an end. We're all getting that little bit closer to death.

And maybe spiritually we need to recognize we're also on a journey. And sometimes in that journey we find ourselves actually going further away from Jesus than closer to Jesus because it's a relational journey.

[16 : 29] And that was very much, wasn't it? That's very much the reality for the Old Testament people of God. They kept traveling the wrong way. Maybe not physically, but in their relationship with God, they kept turning their back on Him.

They kept going their own way. They kept worshipping idols all the time. And so their journey was really tough because they kept turning their back towards the living God.

But it's a great reminder to us that the Christian life is a journey. And you know, you need to ask that question. I need to think about that question every day because we don't get to do the journey twice.

It's not like we get one shot at it and the next time we correct all the mistakes we made first time, we only get one shot at life. We're only on one journey and we are desperately needing the help and the guidance and the rescue of God in our lives as travelers.

And spiritually also as Christians, it can be really tough, can't it? We find it difficult being Christians, the journey. And we need to rely and recognize that this journey is difficult.

[17 : 44] It's a challenge. It's not called a battle for nothing. But it's a journey in which we are alive spiritually as we trust and follow Jesus Christ. And we have a great future.

You know, I was 58 last week. If I wasn't a Christian, I would be hugely depressed at being 58 because you're just getting older and weaker and more prone to illness and death.

Okay? Sorry, young people, but that's the reality. You get to my age, that's what happens. But as a Christian, it's fantastic because I know the best is still to come.

So we're travelers. But we're also, and we can parallel and silhouette, I see it, that we are called to travel together on this Christian journey. One Peter 2 verse 10 tells us that once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.

Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. And it's this ongoing reality that we're a people together. And just as the Old Testament people of God were to journey together, so are we.

[18 : 50] And we are a people who have shared experiences and we are called to companion with one another on this Christian journey. We will face many troubles and the life of faith, we may feel small and insignificant and unimportant in the world or even sometimes sadly in the church.

And we may feel the danger of being overwhelmed, swallowed alive, swept away, trapped, life out of control. Our life plan obliterated our jobs, our dreams, our relationships, our circumstances.

We may be anxious, we may be hated as some of the David speaks about here. We may not be coping with what life has. We may feel trapped like a bird in the fowler's snare, trapped in an abusive marriage, trapped in addiction to porn, trapped in an abusive, destructive lifestyle, trapped.

And it may feel overwhelming and impossible. And the opposition may feel too great, whether it's the philosophies or the thinking or the relationships or the temptations.

And it does feel like it's an ongoing uphill battle, no relief for us. But it may be that on this journey, we've lost sight of our Savior and we're bored and we're like the kids in the back of the seat of the car.

[20 : 21] They say, we're there yet because we just fed up and we wish it was all, we'd all come to an end.

And so often that's the case for all of us and yet none of us know it. And we battle and struggle away on our own because we think that's what Christians should do.

They should just rely on God and just keep on going. And yet He's calling us to journey and travel together because we're a people together and we're called to support and encourage and build one another up and help one another, lead one another, support and be there for, speak well of each other, lift each other up.

When I was thinking about this, and I think I've said this to you before, I'm really bad at illustrations. I can never remember illustrations. I can never think of good ones. But I'm really trying hard.

And when I was thinking of this, you know, call to be traveling together, what immediately came in my mind and thought was Johnny Brownlee. Now, some of you may have never heard of Johnny Brownlee, but he was a triathlete, still is a triathlete, and he has a brother called Alastor.

[21 : 36] And in one of the great races that they were running, Johnny was hit by heat stroke near the end. And you may remember the visual of it. He was kind of all over the place. He was wobbling, his legs were going.

He'd completely lost the ability to run home and he was going to collapse in a heap. And his brother was running well, but was behind him and was near the finishing line.

And instead of finishing the race on his own, he went and he helped his brother and he held him up and he put one arm around him and they both ran together towards the finishing line.

And I thought it was such a great picture of what we asked to do as Christians for one another is we're to look and see the battles and the struggles and the difficulties, be honest with one another, be willing to be helped and be willing to help and share each other struggles.

You and I have to overturn every natural instinct to be independent, to find fault, to be separated from one another, to judge one another, to pretend, to keep private.

[22 : 38] We're called to love and belong and be committed. And it's a great warning against drifting, isn't it? What do we find the great picture of Scripture is there's one sheep that drifts away.

And that sheep is always in danger of being attacked because it's on its own. And so often we think we can cope on our own. I just live this life, me and Jesus, we're like that.

He doesn't call us to that. You're making that up. That's an excuse for being sinfully independent because he calls us, even if you feel as strong as an ox, he calls you to share that strength with others who maybe don't feel quite so strong and not to condemn them for their weakness.

And in reality, realize that if you think you're as strong as an ox, you're probably not thinking properly at all as a Christian.

So called to be travellers together, we are travellers. And the last thing is that, well, almost the last thing, sorry, we need times of spiritual refreshment.

[23 : 44] Okay, this Psalm is clear about that, isn't it? It's a slam of a cent, it's when they were to go up to the three, God commanded the three festivals to happen.

And we're called, because these festivals were times of spiritual refreshment, a break from the normal, doing something different, going on a journey up to Jerusalem together.

We need times of spiritual refreshment. That's why God is great, isn't he? He gives us at least one day a week for spiritual refreshment. It's out of the ordinary. It's Sunday, and we want as a leadership team, you're always to make Sunday special.

We want our worship together to be great and spiritual and prayed over and anticipated. We want you to come to church to be refreshed and to be renewed and to be loved.

We don't want it to be something that you drag your feet to and that you avoid at all costs and any reason not to be there, you take up, because we want you to love it, because it's a time that God gives for refreshment.

[24 : 44] And the singing together, even with the wretched masks is a great thing, because singing is given to us. It just triggers our endorphins and it cheers us up, even when we're grieving.

We sing, well, that's why we love the Psalms, because they've got songs of lament, as well as songs of praise. And we sing because singing changes so much. And we eat and drink together just as God commanded us people in festival.

Both physically, but also spiritually and relationally, we are nourished on one another. And if you take the New Testament development, as it were, of these Old Testament feasts, we are reminded of what God has done for us.

Passover becomes, what does it become, the Lord's Supper, where we remember that He has set us free and the spiritual life that He gives us, which He uses physical bread and wine to remind us of the Feast of Pentecost, 50 days, or the Feast of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover was that reminder.

And also the Feast of Tabernacles, both the pouring out of the Spirit, because it talks about that in Pentecost, isn't it? 50 days after Jesus. Also the Law in our hearts, the nourishment, the provision, the satisfaction.

[26 : 13] There's a great bit in John's Gospel chapter 7 where it's the only mention in the New Testament of the Feast of Tabernacles.

But it's when Jesus, with the disciples and all the people went up to celebrate in the Feast of Booths, that remembering God's provision of water from the rock and manna and His goodness to them.

And it says John 7, 37 to 38, I think it's on the screen as well. On the last and greatest day of the festival, that's that festival of Tabernacles, Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. It's a direct reference to the Old Testament Tabernacle Feast, which celebrated both God's marvellous provision of water from the rock and also His manna.

And He's saying He's the fulfillment of that. And that every one of us who trust in Him will find satisfaction in Him and rest and nourishment spiritually and in every other way.

[27 : 19] So we need these times of refreshment. We need Sundays to remind us of who God is and what He's done. We need special focused spiritual events, festivals, conferences, gatherings, retreats.

We need them in our lives to, with one another, to learn and refresh. And I think in our daily lives, even in our daily lives, can I just say eating and drinking together, that great provision of God for us, which the festivals highlighted and focused on.

You know, in our culture, eating can be so perfunctory, just so superficial and mechanical and unsociable.

We just do it because we should. You know, it's good to eat. Well, I spent some time with Israel and Camilla, and they'll tell you about how they eat in Chile or in Guatemala or in other places in the world where eating is a social and even a spiritual event.

It's the sharing of, it's such a big biblical motif, sharing of life and love, our homes, our faith. It's a great way of evangelizing hospitality.

[28 : 35] It mustn't be just about food. You know, the pandemic's been so hard because we haven't been able to push this great motif in our own church as much as we would love.

It's not a sidebar in St. C'm, St. C's life. It's critical, it's core. It's that place where we relax and we eat and we talk about, that's what I think we should do much more as Christians, eat together but also talk about Jesus because it's a foretaste of heaven.

So rushing through that, we need times of spiritual refreshments. Good to be refreshed. Sundays is a good day to be different from other days because He's given us that in our bodies and souls, a break from routine because He loves us, because He wants us refreshed both spiritually and physically, and He wants us to do that together.

And lastly, we see that God, just as He was with this Old Testament people in Sam 124, God is our shared companion, the Lord who is on our side, the Lord who has redeemed us, the Lord who's taken us up from being swallowed alive from the floods, from the raging streams, from the spiritual enemies.

Blessed, He says, be the Lord who hasn't given us up, who has helped us escape like a bird from the snare of the foul air.

[30 : 01] The snare is broken by Him, we are escaped. Our help, He says, is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. So we're on this journey. It's not a solo journey on our own.

It's not even a journey just with other Christians. But that's the whole point of the Sam that comes to its full blossom in the gospel of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, that Jesus Christ is Emmanuel God with us.

We sung it earlier on. God is with us, the Creator God, Jesus Christ, fashions our rescue on the cross, which is why we celebrate the Passover as the Lord's Supper.

And remember that the cross is Him saying He is the way, the truth in the life. He creates new spiritual life in us. He dwells in us, not just as a companion beside us, but as a living Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit within us.

He is our beating heart as a Christian. We can't live without Him. He's on our side. How often do we think God is not on our side that He's against us as Christians?

[31 : 10] He's not just an enthusiast from the sidelines, but He's the living God who's committed to us through His saving work on the cross, and He is committed to being our help.

What do we need to help, no way? I need to help every single day. It's sealed in His blood. It's driven by His love, and it's the key to living our lives entrusted to Him.

Use His means of grace, church, city group, prayer, the Bible study. Pray with others. Understand that your weakness and my weakness profiles His strength.

It's okay to be weak as we go to Him, and know that the only way we can reflect His light is if we are plugged into Him, into our relationship with Him.

Prayer and the Word of God every day. Every day, because when we don't, we're saying, I don't need you today. I don't need you.

[32 : 11] You're insignificant today. I can cope today on my own, but He says every day. You know, we generally don't think of missing food for the day, do we?

Generally. Even more so spiritually. And it's not a ritual. It's not a legalism. It's need, desperate need in the impossibilities, in the uphill struggles, in the battles, in the joys, and take advantage of the festivals, of the rest times, of getting away, of not being busy, of being in His presence with one another, of refreshing and renewing one another, and say it to our souls every day.

Let Israel now say, so we say it. Let's keep saying it to one another. And before God, let's speak to each other as well. I think, Cody mentioned that Wednesday night as well, speaking to each other, that the truth of God and the festivals that remind us of His great work in the past in our lives.

Amen.