

STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO
THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15)

October 2023 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

Recently, we've considered, in some detail, Paul's experience on the Damascus Road when he met the risen Lord. After Christ introduced himself as 'Jesus of Nazareth' Paul asks an interesting question, 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' (Acts 9:6). Let's take some time to look at the question carefully, emphasizing all its component parts in turn.

Before we do that, however, we should notice that the question arises out of a *relationship* between a servant and a Lord. And, for Paul, this relationship is an entirely new relationship, one which didn't exist just moments before the question was asked. On his way to Damascus, Paul hated Jesus of Nazareth, and hated him precisely *because* of his claim to Lordship – and now, even if he does not yet fully realise all the implications of it, he is acknowledging that claim to be true!

Now, this Servant-Lord relationship describes the relationship between you and Christ as well – if, indeed, you have come to faith. In coming to him, you have come as *a servant to a Lord* – and how fitting it is that a servant's first question to his new master should be 'What will you have me to do?' Paul's question was probably one of our first questions too when we became Christians, but it follows, from the nature of this relationship, that every time the master should summon, the servant's response should be the same.

Well, then, this question arises out of a servant-Lord relationship and, with that in mind, let's look at its various emphases and, first, we note that it is:

A PERSONAL QUESTION

'Lord, what will you have *me* to do?' The question is not 'What will you have *the world* to do?', or 'What will you have *the church* to do?' or 'What will you have *politicians, rulers and church leaders* to do?' Sadly, it is easy to deflect duties and responsibilities from us and onto others.

When Christ told Peter that he, Peter, would one day die for him, Peter turned around, saw John, and asked, 'But Lord, what about *this man*?' Whatever Peter's precise motive in asking the question, it is impossible to miss the rebuke in Christ's response; 'What is that to you? *You follow me*'. And it isn't difficult to work out the reason for the rebuke: too much of Peter's failure consisted in an unwise comparison of himself with others and in drawing too much false comfort from that comparison. Therefore, the warning from the Lord to the servant is all too clear: 'Leave John in my hands; you concentrate on your own obedience to me'. (John 21:18-23)

Again, take the case of those who laboured longest in the vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-16). When the rewards were given out in the end, it is evident that they felt they deserved more than they received. And why? Because they were comparing themselves with their fellow labourers! Had they continued in their labour as they began, all would have been well – but no doubt wearied by 'the burden and heat of the day', they took their eyes off their Lord and began to labour in competition with others. In so doing, their labour lost much of its value: had they retained that single eye to the glory of God, and laboured for him as a labour of love, how differently they would have viewed their own reward and the reward of others! It was their reaction at the end that revealed that their eyes had been on their fellow labourers rather than upon their master.

But the problem is so widespread! In your worship, for example, how often do you hear the Word preached as a message for your neighbour rather than for yourself? How readily you apply the Lord's will, revealed in the sermon, to those beside you – or perhaps to those who are not even there – while missing the rather obvious application of it to yourself! Or, in your general pursuit of holiness, how easy is it for you to become preoccupied with the speck in your brother's eye while oblivious to the beam in your own! Beware, then, lest the failure in another's discipleship becomes more important to you than the failure in your own. To your own master you will both stand or fall (Romans 14:4). 'Take heed to yourself' first (Acts 20:28).

2 Now, it ought to be obvious that this does not mean that you are not to be concerned with others – indeed, *serving others better* is what the Lord might have for you *to do* – but the stress of the question is not to be missed: as a servant, you need to know your master's will *for yourself*, 'Lord, what will thou have *me* to do?'

But note too that the question is not just a *personal* question, it is also:

A PRACTICAL QUESTION

‘Lord, what will you have me *to do*?’ And this should be no surprise. After all, lordship is nothing if not practical: ‘But why do you call me “Lord, Lord” and not do the things which I say?’ It is not ‘What will you have me *to believe*?’ important as that is, but ‘What will you have me *to do*?’ Knowledge, despite its great importance, can ‘puff up’ – that is, fill us with a sense of self-importance – but the practice of doing, or loving, will always ‘edify’ – that is, it will seek the upbuilding and wellbeing of the body of Christ and the salvation of a lost world (1 Corinthians 8:1). That is why we are to be careful that our service to our Lord is not ‘in word and in tongue’ but, rather, ‘in deed and in truth’ (1 John 3:18).

Is the Lord calling you into your (neglected?) secret place, or calling you to the more earnest perusal of his (neglected?) Holy Word – these things are things ‘*to do*’ as well – or might it be that your real neglect lies elsewhere? As we thought recently at our prayer meeting, he may also be calling you to be ‘kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another’, not to be ‘lacking in diligence’ and to be ‘fervent in spirit, serving the Lord’? Is your Lord perhaps calling you to be ‘distributing to the needs of the saints’ or ‘given to hospitality’? And to be ‘kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you?’ (Romans 12: 10-13; Ephesians 4:32)

But notice also that this question is:

A WHOLEHEARTED QUESTION

By wholehearted, I mean that when Paul asks, ‘*What* will you have me to do?’ It is implicit that he is willing to do *whatever* the Lord commands him to do. If he would be willing to do one thing for the Lord but not something else, then his obedience in that one thing is not really an obedience to his Lord: it is more an expression of his own taste and convenience! If it was out of genuine respect to his Lordship, he would do *whatever* his Lordship required, would he not? If you are willing to keep the Sabbath (which the Lord commands you) but are not willing to honour your father or mother, or to tell the truth in a matter (which the Lord also commands you) then your keeping of the Sabbath is not really for the Lord after all, is it? His commandment merely suits you, and you will fulfill those that suit you but not those which do not. But is Christ not either Lord of all or not at all?

And it is not so easy to be as wholehearted in our Master’s service as we would think. Even in this chapter, we do not have to look far for a test. You’ll notice, in verse 9, that the same Lord reveals himself to his servant Ananias, to which Ananias responds, ‘Here I am, *Lord*’. Now the Lord gives Ananias an unwelcome command – to go to the street called ‘Straight’ to the house of Judas and, there, to lay his hands on Saul of Tarsus and restore his sight. Ananias is inclined to refuse – for reasons we can quite understand – and his objection is still addressed to his ‘*Lord*’! What a contradiction! But, in obedience to his Lord, he obeyed.

Similarly, what the Lord is calling you now to do may be hard and perhaps even unpalatable, but your question must be wholehearted – ‘*Lord, what* will you have me to do?’

Finally, it is worth noting that this question is:

AN ANSWERED QUESTION

That is, if we ask it, personally, practically, and wholeheartedly, then it will be answered. After all, the Lord’s response is this: ‘Arise and go into the city and *you will be told what you must do*.’ The Lord will not leave a keen servant without guidance in his ways:

‘Show me thy ways, O Lord; thy paths, O teach thou me: and do thou lead me in thy truth, therein my teacher be...God good and upright is; the way he’ll sinners show. The meek in judgment he will guide and make his path to know.’

And, as I just mentioned, the will of God involved hardship for Paul too: ‘For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name’s sake’ (Acts 9:16).

NEWS & EVENTS

SERMON AUDIO FOUNDATIONS CONFERENCE

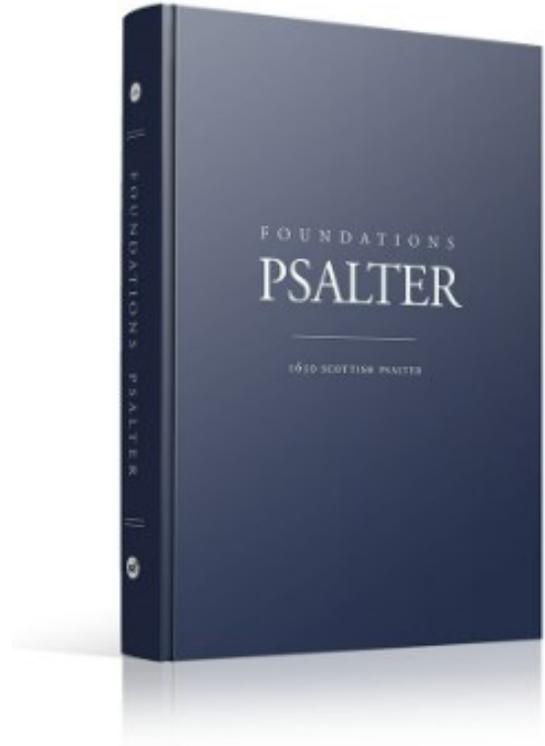
Sermon Audio hold a Foundations Conference each year, intended to focus on the importance of prayer and the ministry of the Word. The conference will be held in New York in December with a variety of ministers, due to preach. The sermons will be made available on Sermon Audio.

Encouragingly, at this years conference they will be singing from the Psalms. They have published a Psalter, with the hope that it will be used of the Lord to revive serious interest in psalm singing in public worship.

You will remember that, last year, we interviewed Steven Lee, the founder of Sermon Audio, when he visited Lewis. He recently had the following to say, in relation to the Foundations Psalter.

“I had the immense privilege of visiting the land of Scotland a few times in the past year or so. I enjoyed visiting historical sites, worshipping with the saints and even praying with one of the last surviving eyewitnesses of the 1950 Isle of Lewis revival. It left a profound impression on me.

But there was one aspect of the trip that caught my attention. There was something particularly edifying about how the Scottish churches sang the Psalms that was a bit different. I would like to bring the psalms in the way I experienced it to this year’s conference. I believe it will be a blessing to you as it was to me.”



BUSINESS HINDRANCE



A member of my congregation, a young man who was an apprentice, became attentive to the subject of religion; and finally, his convictions became very distressing. I had many conversations with him. It all appeared to be in vain. He continued in his distress, without hope, and almost in despair.

One day he said to me, that he believed, he never should obtain religion, if he did not quit work, and devote his whole time and thought to the subject of his salvation. I told him, that that would do him no good— that his duty was to work—that if he would not work, he ought not to eat — that neglecting an earthly duty would not lead him to the discharge of a spiritual one. I argued the case with him strenuously on the ground of the scriptures, “six days shalt thou labour.” I insisted upon it, that the Bible gave no such directions about work, as he was inclined to follow—that if he expected to do his duty to God, he must not omit doing his duty to the world—that, at most, he ought not to do with but working, any longer than he could do without eating,—for, “if any would not work neither should he eat”—and that this want of time was only an excuse of a deceitful heart, to keep him from an instant duty, that is, fleeing to Christ in faith.

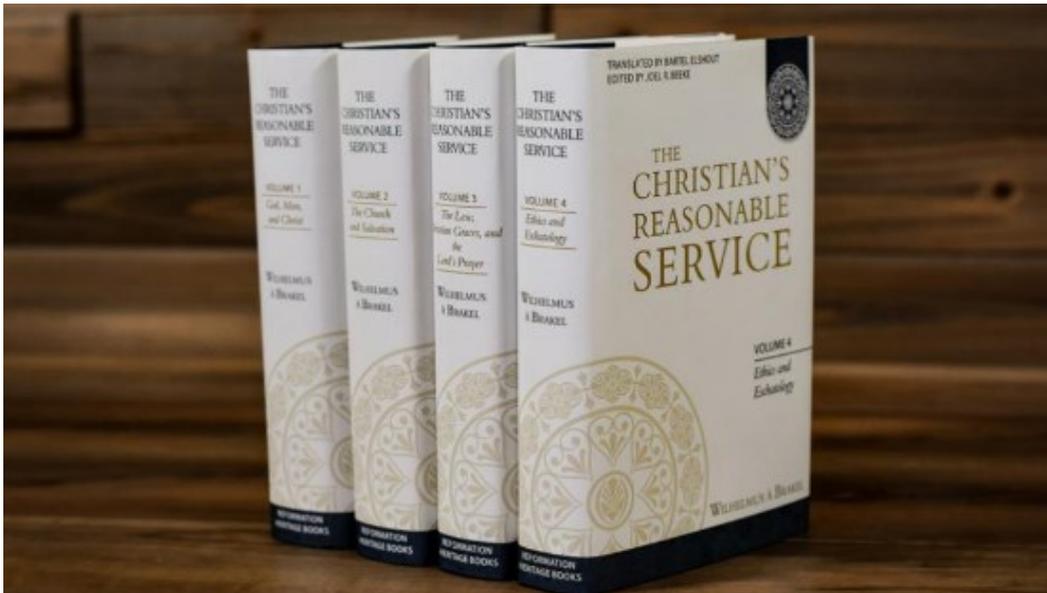
But I could not convince him. He said his mind was drawn off from religion, by his daily employment; and in his opinion, if he had nothing to do, but to seek God, to read arid pray, he should soon find salvation. I told him he would be more likely to find a delusion, and call it salvation. But I could not shake him from his purpose.

He did quit work. He went away over the river, beyond the reach of his companions, got a room alone in an obscure house, and shut himself up with his Bible. He remained there a week. At the end of that time, he called himself to an account, examining his heart, whether he had made any progress. It seemed to him, that he had made none at all. He then determined to be more diligent in the study of his Bible, more anxious in prayer, and to compel his obstinate heart to yield. He often attended our religious meetings in the evenings, and then would return to his solitude. He remained there three weeks. And to his utter astonishment, he found his religious impressions almost entirely gone. He abandoned his retirement and came back to his work in self-defense. “I found,” said he, “my own heart was the worst companion I could have. If I cannot come to repentance in the work-shop, I am sure I never can alone. If I had stayed there much longer, I should have cared nothing about religion.”

He went to work. His seriousness returned. And in about four weeks, he entertained a hope in Christ. He united with the church, and I knew him for years afterwards. He appeared to be a decided and happy Christian.

The human heart will weave an excuse for impenitence, out of anything. This want of time is a very common excuse. But it is a falsehood. The advice given to anxious inquirers so frequently in times of revival, to shut themselves up alone till they have found salvation, just misleads them. It makes them think they lack time for religion; while, in fact, they only lack heart. Let us obey the Bible

WHAT IS IMPLIED WHEN THE GODLY PRAY, “LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION”?



When we pray, –Lead us not into temptation we are not praying for the averting of all temptations or trials resulting from a spiritual or physical cross, or from all circumstances in which we would be able to fall. This is God’s way with all His children whereby He humbles them, exercises them in the battle against the enemies, and sanctifies them. Rather, the petition is as follows: –Neither let the temptation get a hold of nor have power over us; do not withdraw Thy Holy Spirit from us; do not give us over to ourselves when opportunities for sin manifest themselves. When the enemies assault us and seek to toss us to and fro and sift us as wheat, let us then not be overpowered by the temptation. Do not let us be ensnared so that unrighteousness would gain the upper hand; neither give us over to evil inclinations nor to the lusts of our corrupt heart. For where would this not bring us? If, however, it pleases Thee to let situations arise and that snares are laid for us everywhere, and if devils and worldly people in a subtle or evil way scheme to catch us, keep us from falling and lead us by Thy Spirit. Give us strength to remain standing, so that by our fall our own soul be not mortally wounded, the godly be neither grieved nor offended, and Thy Name and true godliness be not blasphemed. Such was David’s prayer: –O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in Thee. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on Thee (Ps 25:20-21); –O forsake me not utterly (Ps 119:8); –Let not them that wait on Thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek Thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel (Ps 69:6).

Thus, the petition not to be led into temptation is indicative of:

- (1) a knowledge and an acknowledgment of the sinfulness of our heart and our weakness to resist temptations;
- (2) a hatred and an aversion for sin and a fear for falling into sin;
- (3) a love for communion with God, which is affected and obscured by a falling into sin; as well as a love for the honour of God’s Name, the reputation of godliness, and the joy of the godly;
- (4) faith in God’s care for His own, and in God’s omnipotence to give them strength to subdue the enemies in their assaults; as well as faith in the goodness of God as rendering Him willing to do this, and His veracity that He will do it, having promised to hear and answer prayer.

HE IS ALTOGETHER LOVELY

“He is altogether lovely” (Song of Solomon 5:16)

He is lovely in His person—the glorious all-sufficiency of His deity, the gracious purity and holiness of His humanity, His authority and majesty, His love and power.

He is lovely in His birth and incarnation—when He, who was rich, became poor for our sake, taking on flesh and blood because we share in the same. He was made of a woman, so that He could be made under the law for our sake.

He is lovely throughout His entire life, displaying more than angelic holiness and obedience, even amidst poverty and persecution—doing good while receiving evil, blessing and being cursed, reviled, and reproached all His days.

He is lovely in His death, yes, most lovely to sinners—never more glorious and desirable than when He came broken and dead from the cross. He carried all our sins into a land of forgetfulness; He made peace and reconciliation for us; He obtained life and immortality on our behalf.

He is lovely in His entire mission, in His great undertaking—in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. He serves as a mediator between God and us, to restore the glory of God's justice and to save our souls. He brings us to the enjoyment of God, bridging the infinite gap caused by sin.

He is lovely in the glory and majesty with which He is crowned. He is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Although He is fearsome to His enemies, He is full of mercy, love, and compassion towards His beloved ones.

He is lovely in all the provisions of grace and consolation, in all the dispensations of His Holy Spirit, in which His saints participate.

He is lovely in all the tender care, power, and wisdom that He exercises in protecting, safeguarding, and delivering His church and people, even in the face of opposition and persecution.

He is lovely in all His ordinances and in the entirety of the spiritually glorious worship that He has ordained for His people, enabling them to draw near and commune with Him and His Father.

He is lovely and glorious in the vengeance He takes and will ultimately execute upon the stubborn enemies of Himself and His people.

He is lovely in the forgiveness He has purchased and dispenses, in the reconciliation He has established, in the grace He imparts, in the consolations He provides, in the peace and joy He gives to His saints, and in His assured preservation of them until they reach glory.

What more can I say? There is no end to His excellences and desirability. "He is altogether lovely. This is our beloved, and this is our friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

Children's Corner



Dear children,

Have you ever visited a castle? If you haven't, then you should think about visiting the one we have in Stornoway. It's called the Lewis Castle and you can see it in the picture. Castles are really interesting buildings, full of places to explore. I was there recently with two young boys, and they were wanting to explore everything – in fact, the older brother had to stop the younger one from opening every door!

My visit to the castle reminded me of a very good book called 'The Holy War' (it was written by John Bunyan, who also wrote the 'Pilgrim's Progress'). 'The Holy War' is a bit like a parable – although it seems just like an ordinary story, it has a special spiritual meaning.

I'm just going to tell you a little bit about it and if you think you would like it, perhaps your parents could buy it for you?

The book is all about a city called Mansoul. The city was built by King Shaddai and he was going to give it as a gift to His only son, called Prince Emmanuel. There was a castle at the centre of the city and there was a great giant called Diabolus and he – and his followers – were always trying to capture the castle. But it was very difficult to capture the castle because it had a great wall all around it.

Although the castle wall was very strong, it had five gates: they were the Eye gate, the Ear gate, the Mouth gate, the Feel gate, and the Nose gate. Now, it was really important to guard these gates carefully so that Diabolus would not get in. And the people in Mansoul did just that – they guarded the gates very carefully.

But the evil giant and all his followers make a sneaky plan: they would all go to the castle wall and Diabolus would say bad things about the King so that the people would open the gates to let him in. To give them a better chance of success, the followers would make themselves invisible so that the people would only see Diabolus – who would make himself look like a dragon (he really looked much worse than that).

Sadly, by telling terrible lies, and while his invisible followers fired darts, Diabolus managed to get the people of Mansoul to open all the gates. Then, they rushed in and took over the castle!

When King Shaddai heard what happened to the castle in his precious city of Mansoul, he called a special meeting with Prince Emmanuel. They both loved the people of Mansoul very much and they did not want to leave them in the wicked hands of the evil giant Diabolus. At this meeting, they agreed to do something they had planned long ago (because they knew this would happen).

The rest of the book, the main part of it, tells how King Shaddai and Prince Emmanuel put the plan into action and recaptured Mansoul.

I wonder if you're beginning to understand what the book is really about? Yes, it's telling us what happened when Satan came into the hearts of Adam and Eve – and everyone else! – and how God the Father and Jesus, the Son of God, planned to win people back again.

The story has lots of interesting people and, as you read, maybe you can think who these people really are? I suppose I could tell you – but I don't want to spoil your fun reading the book!

With my love and prayers

Mrs S

