

Downton Baptist Church

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13th September 2020 Morning Worship

WELCOME

Good Morning.

Our Service is being filmed and broadcast live from the Church. We have produced this so you can read the transcripts of the Service. The prayers and the talk. We hope you find this helpful. Please do let us know if we can help you in any other way.

God Bless

Philip and Katy

This is website address if you can access it.

www.downtonbaptist.org/Groups/337711/Pastors_Message.aspx

READING

Exodus 15: 1-18

¹ Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

“I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.

Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.

² “The LORD is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

³ The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.

⁴ Pharaoh’s chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea.

The best of Pharaoh’s officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.

⁵ The deep waters have covered them;
they sank to the depths like a stone.

⁶ Your right hand, LORD,

was majestic in power.
Your right hand, LORD,
shattered the enemy.

⁷ “In the greatness of your majesty
you threw down those who opposed you.
You unleashed your burning anger;
it consumed them like stubble.

⁸ By the blast of your nostrils
the waters piled up.
The surging waters stood up like a wall;
the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹ The enemy boasted,
‘I will pursue, I will overtake them.
I will divide the spoils;
I will gorge myself on them.
I will draw my sword
and my hand will destroy them.’

¹⁰ But you blew with your breath,
and the sea covered them.
They sank like lead
in the mighty waters.

¹¹ Who among the gods
is like you, LORD?
Who is like you—
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?

¹² “You stretch out your right hand,
and the earth swallows your enemies.

¹³ In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
to your holy dwelling.

¹⁴ The nations will hear and tremble;
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.

¹⁵ The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,
the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,
the people of Canaan will melt away;

¹⁶ terror and dread will fall on them.
By the power of your arm
they will be as still as a stone—
until your people pass by, LORD,
until the people you bought pass by.

¹⁷ You will bring them in and plant them
on the mountain of your inheritance—

the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling,
the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established.

¹⁸ “The LORD reigns
for ever and ever.”

Ezekiel 11: 16-20

¹⁶ “Therefore say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.’

¹⁷ “Therefore say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.’

¹⁸ “They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. ¹⁹ I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. ²⁰ Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

TALK

Today is our **second** look at the call to **conversion** as we find it in scripture

Last week we saw that conversion in the Jewish scriptures...

...begins with God calling a people back to himself

He calls them to turn around...to change their hearts and minds...

... and to live the life that he wills

A life of Justice, mercy, love and peace

The life he planned for us from the very beginning

That is what makes them his people...

A truly peculiar people...

...A light to the world

Conversion is often thought of as a task that we have to achieve...

Something we have to choose and work for ourselves

...And of course it is...

But perhaps this is also where we come unstuck

Perhaps we've tried and feel we've failed

Perhaps we've given up what feels like a hopeless task

Perhaps like Paul we feel that whatever we do or say we keep going our own way

But if you read the scriptures you will find that they are very realistic...

Realistic about what we can achieve through just our own sheer will power

The Bible is relentlessly real...It tells the truth about who we are

As uncomfortable as it is...It tells the truth we need to hear

It shows how we get tied up in our own ways and habits

It describes how we become trapped by our own self interest

Addicted to me

So that we cannot change even if we want to

As the people moved towards exile it became apparent to the writers of the time that Israel was unable to repent

The prophet Jeremiah writes

*Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots?
Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.*

The prophets know that conversion must come another way

If there is to be newness it must come from another source

And so the prophets make two remarkable suggestions...

Firstly...Ezekiel offers a new idea

He lived in a time when people had little or no hope of change...

...no good or hopeful future seemed to be possible

Perhaps we...who are so privileged... can understand that better now?

You hear Ezekiel continuing to call for repentance...for conversion

Even though he knew that it wasn't possible

And so he describes the Lord as prepared to take a radical step

God is going to give Israel new organs of decision making

New hearts that would replace the old hard hearts that had turned against their maker

Let's listen again

Ezekiel 11:19-20

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

Elsewhere Ezekiel writes

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will pour out within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh

This is quite extraordinary

Conversion...turning back to God...

...does not depend on Israel...but upon the gift of a new possibility given by God himself

When the old and hardened heart fails...

...We are told about the possibility of a heart transplant

The conclusion we must make is that conversion is not only a work that is required of God's people

Of all of us

It is also the work of God who gives us the gifts to change ourselves

God helps us to turn...by his grace

A free undeserved gift

Conversion is possible...because God wills that it is possible...And that is good news

Luke 18:26-27

Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

God opens the door for us

Secondly and perhaps even more radically and controversially...

...The prophets suggest an idea that might take us a while to fully comprehend

When we walk away...when our relationship with God is broken

When we are called to repent but cannot

Then God turns

Don't be too scandalized or shocked yet...

Walter Bruggeman says that this is the most radical idea in the entire bible

So if you are feeling surprised...shocked even...then don't be surprised!!

In the Jewish scriptures God is presented not primarily as all knowing...all powerful...or all present...[although he is all these things]

...but as a covenant partner

One who freely makes intervention and makes new decisions toward his covenant partner

Israel...The church...you and me

God is like no other God...no one would have dared to suggest such a thing

No one could have made it up

Exodus 15:11

Who among the gods is like you, Lord?

Who is like you—majestic in holiness,

awesome in glory, working wonders?

God is not static...He is more a verb than a noun

He is not passive

He is a dynamic covenant partner

A covenant partner who is always faithful to his partners

Who acts in compassionate, gracious ways to renew and transform...

The truly radical claim of the Jewish scripture is that God's self is converted/turned on behalf of his people

Hosea expresses this most powerfully

In Hosea we hear God reprimanding his people ...and there really seems like no way forward

It sounds completely hopeless and the people are helpless

"When Israel was a child, I loved him,

and out of Egypt I called my son.

But the more they were called,

*the more they went away from me
They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.
It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love.
To them I was like one who lifts
a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them.
"Will they not return to Egypt
and will not Assyria rule over them
because they refuse to repent?
A sword will flash in their cities;
it will devour their false prophets
and put an end to their plans.
My people are determined to turn from me.
Even though they call me God Most High,
I will by no means exalt them.*

It is tragic...sad and all too familiar

The covenant truly seems to be over...They have turned away

Israel has turned so far from God that there seems no way back

But God so wills...so loves them...that God chooses to act

God turns...his mind is changed to a new way

My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; For I am God and no mortal, The Holy one is in your midst and I will not come in wrath.

God is not remote and indifferent.

The essence of this God is his passionate freedom to sustain his relationship with his children

Whatever it takes

Grace

In Amos the same note is sounded

Amos intercedes with God on behalf of Israel

He asks that God doesn't act in justifiable wrath against the people

God once more is moved by the prayer

The Lord relented concerning this; It shall not be said the Lord

The Story of Jonah also

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them and he did not do it

God changed his mind

Of course what we see here is a wonderful double changing of minds

A wonderful double conversion

Nineveh is converted to God...and God to Nineveh

What we are seeing and here is extraordinary, unbelievable, surprising, shocking, scandalous and truly wonderful

We are seeing the affirmation of divine compassion and God's true freedom to act according to his will and purposes

And not to any preordained rule or stereotype

Think about that for a moment

We are seeing the deeply personal character of our God

God is like no other God...either ancient or modern

He is like no God we could create or dream up

He will not just fit our ideas and presumptions

Even our precious closely guarded religious ideas

God wills covenant...he wills relationship...He wills love...He is love

He calls us to turn...to repent...to return to Him

BUT

As we will see in Jesus...God asks nothing of them that God himself will not do

He asks nothing of you and me that that he has not done and will not do

God turns to us...Such is incredible amazing grace

God is radically fully for his people...For you

If you have never realised it...and been tempted to despair...then hear again

God loves you with a love which is beyond belief...Believe it and live!

And it is God's willingness to turn that makes everything possible...it makes our conversion possible

We may stand amazed and surprised by all of this...as well we might

But it also helps us to understand our own humanness...

...We are made in the image of God

It tells us that when we are truly fully human...grown up humans...

Our true humanness is seen in our capacity to turn

To change...to repent

We are the image bearers of the one true God

And it is seen...

In our willingness to care so much...to love so deeply...

...and to change so freely that we can make promises to love and keep them

In doing this...we are most like God

The God who created us and continually calls us to turn to him

By the grace of God may we come to understand the greatness of his love for us all

The wonders of his wisdom

The power of his compassion

The healing of his humility

And in the light of his goodness may we embrace the new hearts that he offers us today

Lord in your mercy...Hear our prayer

Amen

PRAYERS

Father God

We pray for those most at need in our communities.
The hidden, the lost, the lonely,
Thank you that when we are in need, that Your grace is sufficient.

We pray for those who are feeling helpless
The unconfident, those who have nothing, those who feel empty.
Thank you that when we feel unworthy, that You are preparing us.

We pray for those feeling weak
For those on dumpsites, for those you have had power taken for the people of the Yemen.
Thank you that in You, we know that nothing is impossible.

We pray for those feeling isolated
For people who won't speak to anyone today, for the widows, the orphans and the
strangers.
Thank you that you are intimately present, when we feel most alone.

We pray for those who feel darkness surrounding them.
For the angry places, for the fearful homes, for the violent struggles.
Thank you that Your light, is shining before us, to lead us home.

We pray for our friends and families, when we cannot be near
For the missing embrace, for the loving words, for the grieving hearts.
Thank you that when we cannot be there, we know that You are.

Father, in these days
We thank you for Your blessings that we see
We thank you for Your blessing we miss.
We ask that You hear our prayers
In the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

BLESSING

May the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, son and Holy Spirit be with you all today and
forever more
Amen