

Sunday 22 November 2020, a service for use at home; Haddington West Church

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

Ps.100: *“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”*

Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, it is your will to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, our Lord and King. Grant that the peoples of the earth, now divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his gentle and loving rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN

Rejoice, the Lord is King!

1 Rejoice, the Lord is King!

your Lord and King adore;
mortals, give thanks and sing,
and triumph evermore:
*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice, again I say, rejoice.*

2 Jesus the Saviour reigns,
the God of truth and love;
when He had purged our stains,
He took His seat above:
Lift up your heart . . .

3 His kingdom cannot fail,
He rules o'er earth and heaven;
the keys of death and hell

are to our Jesus given:
Lift up your heart . . .

4 He sits at God's right hand,
till all His foes submit,
and bow to His command,
and fall beneath His feet:
Lift up your heart . . .

5 Rejoice in glorious hope;
Jesus the Judge shall come,
and take His servants up
to their eternal home:
*We soon shall hear the archangel's
voice;
the trump of God shall sound, rejoice!*

Words by
Charles Wesley

Ezekiel.34,11-24

“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and make them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must

you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.”

Dear friends

A professor of mine once told me of a mountain-top encounter in which a gentleman, on learning that the man he was talking to was a professor of theology, said after a little pause: “The only thing I believe in is that my dinner tonight is sausage and potatoes.” This has always stayed with me. Here was a man who was saying, ‘This is the prospect I have before me and this, therefore is the nature and extent of my belief.’

This connection between a prospect we have before us – what do we behold of the future? what are we counting on as we look ahead? – and our beliefs are important. Surely our beliefs say something about the prospects we think we have before us. Not only that but they influence what they will turn out to be, because they guide us in our action.

We readily find an illustration for this in current events. Now that there are working vaccines about to become available the prospects for 2021 look suddenly much improved, because we believe that these vaccines will ensure the return to normal, or at least largely unrestricted, circumstances. And because of the belief in this improved prospect, shares have gone up in some places and they have gone down in others. Already this faith goes to work shaping the prospect of making some winnings and avoiding losses.

In God’s word that we have before us his people are given a prospect; it is a magnificent one, given to them to believe in, to rejoice over, to count on, to expect most certainly. The circumstances of this prospect, in the imagery used, is that of sheep gathered, rescued, brought home and looked after, kept safe from those that would bully them, lead them astray or use them for their own ends (ie, determine for them a different prospect!) – of sheep looked after by God himself: *“I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep.”*

This is, as his people are meant to understand, and we too, is not some small, short, or medium term, prospect to be replaced or followed on by another, but is ultimate. It speaks of life’s completion, the journey’s end. In Rev.21 it is described in words speaking of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’, where God’s dwelling place will be *“among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* (Rev.21,1-4)

The ‘passing away of the old order of things’ reminds us, or makes the point, that this ultimate prospect, which is decisive for all, is established on God’s judgment. In our passage it is put like this: *“I myself will tend my sheep and make them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for*

the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”

Who are ‘the sleek and the strong’? Is it not they who do not hope for nor expect nor need God’s help and intervention and who seek to set aside the purpose of God? Is it not they who do not fear the judgment of God; to whom justice is not a matter of God’s order but of the order they impose on things after their own will? Is it not they who believe in their own ultimate prospect regardless of God, regardless of where they are before him?

Dear friends, as God gives his people the prospect they have before them, of restoration and peace, it is part of the message to say most clearly: There is no prospect that God does not and will not judge. To teach that there is such a prospect is to muddy the waters, to believe it is to hold up a false prospect. Where the denial of God’s judgment, to take place on the basis of God’s word, prevails, there you find the effort to undermine the faith and steadfastness of those who believe in the prospect of God’s redemption. This cannot go unreckoned. And so God says: *“See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another.”*

Dear friends, God has now initiated the fulfilment of this prospect. Because when he said, *‘I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them’*, he was pointing forward to the coming of ‘Immanuel’, God with us, Jesus Christ. He has come. And now it is of the highest significance that this Jesus died on the cross, that the sinless Son of God bore the sins of the world in judgment, and that he was raised from the dead to the light of life everlasting, to the fullness of life, thus making a way for humanity to be reconciled to God, sins to be forgiven and grace to rule. Indeed, to bring about what Ezekiel describes.

Our prospect as we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died for us, is that we shall share with him the glory he now has with the Father and that we are kept in the love and faithfulness of God. Wherever our ways shall take us on our pilgrimage – even through vales of tears, the valley of the shadow of death, facing suffering - this is where they must end. On this let us count, believing the glorious prospect before us. For the Lord is King and he reigns, and those who dwell in him dwell in peace. AMEN

Come, people of the risen King

1 Come, people of the risen King,
who delight to bring Him praise.
Come all, and tune your hearts to sing
to the morning star of grace.
From the shifting shadows of the earth
we will lift our eyes to Him,
where steady arms of mercy reach
to gather children in.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Let every heart rejoice!
One heart, one voice,
O church of Christ, rejoice!

2 Come, those whose joy is morning sun,
and those weeping through the night.
Come, those who tell of battles won,
and those struggling in the fight.
For His perfect love will never change
and His mercies never cease,
but follow us through all our days
with the certain hope of peace.
Rejoice . . .

3 Come, young and old from every land,
men and women of the faith.
Come, those with full or empty hands,
find the riches of His grace.
Over all the world His people sing –
shore to shore we hear them call
the truth that cries through every age:
'Our God is all in all!'
Rejoice . . .

Keith and Kristyn Getty

Stuart Townend

Father in heaven, our Lord and God, we thank and praise you for the glorious prospect we have before us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. In him we see where we are going, in him we have our guide and shepherd; he is our King, who will not fail us. You have sent him to deliver us from sin and from death and from the evil one – and he succeeded in all through cross and resurrection

- time of prayer / intercession –

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen'

"May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of an eternal covenant, make you perfect in all goodness so that you may do his will; and may he create in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever!" Hebrews 13, 20-21

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.

AMEN