

Receiving the Word: The Obedience of Real Faith

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[0 : 01] But moving on from that now, let's turn to our Bible readings. We pick up from where we left off in Nehemiah. We'll be reading from the very end of chapter 9 through to the end of chapter 10.

If you're using a church visitor's Bible, that is on page 406. Last week we read the people's prayer in chapter 9, and this week it's the people's response along with that prayer.

So beginning chapter 9, verse 38, reading through to the end of chapter 10. Because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing.

On the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests. On the seals are the names of Nehemiah, the governor, the son of Hakaliah, Zedekiah, Zeriaah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pasher, Amariah, Malkijah, Hattish, Shebaniah, Maluch, Harim, Merimoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshulam, Abijah, Majamin, Maziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah.

These are the priests. And the Levites. Jeshua, the son of Azaniah, Binwi, of the sons of Henadad, Cadmiel, and their brothers, Shabaniah, Hodiah, Kalita, Paliah, Hanan, Micah, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zachar, Sherebiah, Shabaniah, Hodiah, Bani, Benuni, the chiefs of the people, Parosh, Pahaf, Moab, Elam, Zatu, Bani, Benuni, Asgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvi, Adin, Atar, Hezekiah, Azur, Hodiah, Hashem, Bezai, Harif, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpayesh, Meshulam, Hezer, Mishazabel, Zadok, Jaduah, Peletiah, Hanan, Ananiah, Hosea, Hananiah, Hashub, Haluhesh, Pilha, Shubek, Rehum, Hashabna, Maseah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, Maluch, Harim, Bana.

[2 : 28] The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the people of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law that was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord, our Lord, and his rules and his statutes. We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any green on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day, and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. We will also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God.

For the showbread, the regular green offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel and for all the work of the house of our God. We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering to bring it into the house of our God, according to our father's houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law. We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of your ground and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord, also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks, and to bring the first of our dew and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God, and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground. For it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tithe to the tithes, the tithe of the tithes, to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God. Amen.

Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Nehemiah chapter 10, page 406, if you have one of our visitors' Bibles. A chapter all about the obedience of real faith. What does real Christian faith look like in a person who's a true Christian, or in a church that is a truly Christian church? Well, faith has become a very threadbare term in our culture today. It usually just means a vague belief in something, or even worse, a belief in something against all the evidence against it being true.

I still believe that Scotland has a very fine football team. But let me say very clearly that this kind of idea of faith, which is little more than wishful thinking and even fantasy, it is the very opposite of what the Bible actually means by faith. Faith, as the Bible speaks of it, is never a leap into the dark. Faith is a step into the light. It is eyes being opened to see the ultimate reality. At last, the glory of God and his eternal purposes. And it's hearts being opened to all of that reality through an experience of real repentance, which is a turning of our allegiance away from sin and towards the living God, away from the idolatry of this world, and towards obedience submission to God in Jesus Christ. And that real repentance, which lies at the very heart of all real biblical faith, it is always a visible and a tangible thing. So what does it look like?

Well, here is a chapter that I think demonstrates very clearly what the fruit of real heart repentance and renewed faith looks like in a congregation of God's people, a people who have truly received God's word and where that word is bearing fruit in their midst. And as Paul says, remember, all of these scriptures of the Old Testament, they're all written down for our instruction. Even though we live in these ends of the ages, they're here to teach us. And how much more should we today who have received so much more, how much more should we be challenged and encouraged by this example of real living faith that's deeply personal, that's public, that's so deliberate and purposeful in its determination to honor the commands of God in every part of life, to glorify him before the whole world as children of light, showing forth everything that is good and right and true to the peoples of the lands around.

[8 : 04] So look at how this chapter demonstrates that real faith and how that living faith manifests in obedience that is a very solid and tangible thing, in real commitment, in real consecration and with real cost. Look at verses 9, chapter 9, verse 38 through to chapter 10, verse 27, this great long list of names. The meaningful seals that this speaks about tells us of the commitment of real signatories.

The commitment of real signatories. Verse 38, because of all this, that's their confession of sin, their recommitment to God as their God. Because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing.

And on the sealed document are the names, the names of all the leaders, all the people. From the governor, the priests, the Levites, to all the rest. Now the great prayer that we looked at last week in chapter 9 made very clear that the people's only hope was in the Lord God's forgiving and restoring grace. If you look back to chapter 9, verse 31, you'll see it's very clear. Israel, the only reason Israel was not forsaken, not destroyed, was because of God's grace and mercy.

Because, as verse 32 there says, because God keeps covenant and steadfast love. But God's grace, God's covenant grace is never cheap grace. God's grace always demands response from his people. And the response that God requires is faithful repentance.

Or repentant faith, whichever way you like to put it, because it's all the same thing. It's about a real unreserved surrender to the rule of the one true God. And that's always so, right through the Bible, from beginning to end. You come to Romans chapter 10, Paul says so clearly that his gospel that he's preaching is one and the same covenant faith that Moses preached. And he calls people, just as Moses did, to trust and obey. Paul says, believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, that is, trust in his death and resurrection to be your savior. And confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, that is, submit to his rule and to obey him as Lord and Master. Do these things and you will be saved.

[10 : 36] Trust and obey. And notice what this confession of Lordship really means. It's a necessarily public thing, isn't it, for Paul? You commit yourself with your lips that your life is to be lived in obedience to Christ's rule as a binding commitment made publicly before God and in front of other people who are there to hold you to it. And that's exactly what we see here in our chapter this morning. It's purposeful, it's deliberate, it's in writing, it's public as well as personal. Every name is there together in a commitment of the whole congregation of Israel to one another and to God himself.

And of course, that's echoed in the New Testament in just the same way, where there's never any conception that you can be a Christian, a real follower of Jesus and not be at the same time a committed member of the living church of Jesus Christ. Because belonging to Jesus means that you belong to his people. Loving Jesus means that you love his people. Being committed properly to Jesus means you're committed properly to your brothers and sisters in Christ. And you make public commitment to the church through baptism as whole households become publicly committed Christian households in the New Testament. Just like here in verse 28, it's exactly the same. Children along with parents and so on. And that's why tonight when we'll be welcoming new members into our fellowship, they'll be doing exactly that, won't they? Making public confession of their faith and a personal commitment to serve Christ with us in this church here. Covenanting together to live under the rule of one master, the Lord Jesus Christ, and to keep one another to that. And that's the pattern that

God has laid out for his church. The church is not just a collection of individual Christians. It's a body, says the Apostle Paul, with many members, each vitally connected to each other. And we need that, don't we?

We live in an age when people are increasingly reticent and fearful often of commitment. They want to shrink back often even from commitment to the church. But that's not just an insult to Christ, because what you're saying is you don't really trust his pattern that he wants for his church.

But also it's very foolish. It's very dangerous because we need one another. None of us is ever beyond the danger of slipping away, of falling back in our faith. That's why the New Testament urges us constantly not to give up meeting together. Not to give up praying together, learning together, being challenged together, keeping one another in the faith. That's what we're called to do.

[13 : 26] If we don't do that, it's a disaster. Now, some of us are probably very aware of very particular struggles that we might have, particular temptations that we're very vulnerable to. And people like that do tend to make very sure that they're surrounded by the body of Christ to keep them accountable.

But as somebody has said, it's not only obvious moral crashes that betoken of falling away from God. There's the dullness of spirit that's never marked in such a way. There's a lack of care and concern for the things of God. There's the slow, imperceptible coldness of heart that reduces spiritual life to a chilling and tragic mediocrity. And how many ways believers can be betrayed into unfaithfulness.

Over the years, I've certainly seen many, many more drift away into coldness and mediocrity than I have seen collapse through some great moral calamity in their life. And that's why Christ calls us to that binding commitment, both public and personal, in covenant union with him and with one another in his church. And to the regular covenant renewals that we need week by week as we meet together to recommit ourselves, to bind ourselves again to the Lordship of Jesus Christ together under his rule.

This is the means of grace that enables us to endure, to keep faith with God. We can't presume upon God, can we? We will only persevere if we make use of the means that God has given us and commanded us to use so that we will persevere. And that is the church. Paul's so clear on that in Ephesians 4, isn't he? We will only attain the maturity and the completeness, which is the goal of our faith, he says, as part of the body of Christ. The whole body, when each part is working properly, builds itself in love as it draws on Christ, who's the head. So friend, heeds the Bible's warning.

If you remain on the fringe, if you remain never personally committed, never publicly committed to the church of Jesus Christ, never belonging in that committed way with others in a real and living church fellowship, that's not just disobedient to Christ. It's deadly dangerous for you.

[15 : 56] The meaningful seals here reflect the commitment of real signatories, a people personally and publicly committed in covenant with God and with one another to be his people, to live as his people, to live in obedience to his call upon them, which is what being a believer is all about.

But what is that commitment to? Well, verses 28 to 31 tell us. It means commitment to a meaningful separation. These verses describe a consecration of real seriousness. First notice just how deadly serious it is. Verse 29, together they enter into a curse and an oath. That is a very solemn covenant vow calling on God to judge them if they should go back on their word. Now again, we live in a very superficial age where words and pledges just don't mean much. But there is nothing flippant here, is there? Nothing frivolous. These people took the living God very seriously indeed. And I think as Christians today, perhaps, we need to learn to take the living God a little more seriously than we do most of the time. I think sometimes we read the Old Testament, don't we? And we think, well, yes, but it's all different for us now, isn't it? Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. He would never make us tremble.

He would never talk about curses and judgments. Friends, if that's what you think, it must be a long time since you've been reading the Gospels. Go back and read them. Almost every page is full of Jesus' own urgent warnings. Read the epistles. It is a fearful thing, says Hebrews 10, to fall into the hands of the living God. If you renege on your vow to follow Christ and thereby profane the blood of the covenant by which you're sanctified, by which you've been separated, set apart to be holy to the Lord.

No. Let us serve God with reverence and awe, says the apostle, to the Christian church, he's speaking. As these people here were certainly doing. They covenanted themselves together with real seriousness.

And they understood that they meant what they said. That they should be consecrated. That they should be set apart, separated.

[18 : 29] Verse 28. Separated from the peoples of the lands. Note that phrase again in verse 30 and verse 31. And separated to the law of the Lord, their God.

At the heart of what it means to be God's redeemed people lies a great separation. Not a racial separation, of course. All through the Bible story there were Gentile outsiders who were brought in and became holy along with the people of God. But this is a religious separation.

From all false gods. From all false religions. From all pagan attitudes and cultures. To a living walk with the true and living God.

That's the heart of the covenant. Listen to these words from Leviticus chapter 26. I will walk among you and will be your God and you will be my people. I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

That you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. What a magnificent description of redemption.

[19 : 38] You've been redeemed from bondage. From the world of pagan idolatry. But to the life of the one true God. And therefore set apart to be his distinct and his distinctive people.

Shaped in every way by his commands. Verse 29. By his rules. By his statutes. So as to display. In this dark world.

In this fallen world. The brightness. The beauty. The grace of God. The health. The wholeness. Wholeness. Of true humanity. That is being restored into his image through grace. And that must entail.

Mustn't it? A great separation. From the culture. From the values. From the morality. From the ambitions of a world that doesn't know God. And that hates God. And is opposed to God. At the heart.

Of God's covenant grace. This lies. A great. Necessary negative. Leviticus 20. You shall not walk. In the customs of the nations.

[20 : 39] I am driving out before you. For they did all of these things. And he's talking about. Vile sexual practices. Child sacrifice. Terrible violence. Exploitation. They did these things.

And therefore I detested them. But I am the Lord. Who has separated you. From the peoples. You shall be holy to me. For I the Lord am holy.

And I've separated you. From these peoples. That you. Should be mine. But of course.

Repeatedly. In their sinfulness. They had not separated themselves. They just acted exactly like. The pagan world around them. And so eventually. God had cast them. Out of the land.

Into exile. If you look back at chapter 9. Verse 30. Look at the language. It says. God gave them back. Into the hand of. The peoples of the lands. But now.

[21 : 35] He has fulfilled again. The promise. That he gave through the prophets. Of another great redemption. To bring them out. Just like out of Egypt. Out of exile. And once again.

To be separated. As his true people. Listen to the words of the prophet. Shake yourself from the dust. And arise. O Jerusalem. Loose the bonds.

From your neck. O captive daughter of Zion. You shall be redeemed. The watchman. See the return of the Lord. To Zion. The ends of the earth. Shall see the salvation. Of our God. Depart.

Depart. Go out. From there. Touch. No unclean thing. Go out. From the midst of her. From the midst of the people. Of the lands. Purify yourselves. You.

Who bear the vessels of the Lord. That was. What the Lord said. Through the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 51. And here's the beginning. Of that fulfillment. As the returned exiles.

- [22 : 27] Consecrate themselves. To be a people. Again. Set apart. To the Lord. Their God. A people called. Out of darkness. And into light. A people.
- Called. To proclaim. The excellencies. Of him. Who has called them. Out of darkness. Into light. And to show forth. His beauty. Again. In the world. And of course.
- If that kind of language. Sounds very familiar. To us from the New Testament. It should do. Because it's. The apostle Peter's description. Isn't it? Of the Christian church. And that is because. The ultimate fulfillment.
- Of all these prophetic promises. To restore God's people. To make them truly holy. It only comes to its fulfillment. In the person and work. Of our Lord Jesus.
- In the great redemption. That separates. God's people forever. From the world of sin. From the flesh. From the devil. And brings us. Into.
- [23 : 22] The kingdom. Of the son of his love. Paul says to the Romans. You have been separated. From death to life. From being slaves of sin. To being slaves of righteousness.
- To being obedient. From the heart. To the teaching. About Christ. That they'd received. So we're to no longer live. Like the world.
- But as children of God. In Christ. That's what the apostle says. Or Peter. In 1 Peter 1. As obedient children. Do not be conformed. To the passions.
- To the passions. And the passions. Of your former ignorance. But as he who has called you is holy. So also be holy. In all your conduct. Since it is written. You shall be holy.
- For I am holy. He's quoting Leviticus. Just as Paul does. When he quotes. Both. Leviticus 26. And Isaiah 51. That I just quoted there. Quotes that to the Corinthian church.
- [24 : 19] In 2 Corinthians chapter 6. Where he urges and commands them. To be separate. From the culture of unbelief. That is all around them. For what partnership. Does unrighteousness have.
- With righteousness. Or what fellowship. Light with darkness. What agreement. Does the temple of the Lord have. With idols. Says Paul. For we. Are the temple of the living God. God said.
- I will make my dwelling among them. I will be their God. And they shall be my people. Therefore. Be separate from them. Says the Lord. That's Paul writing. To the Christian church. So he says.
- Let us cleanse ourselves. From every defilement. Of body and spirit. And bring holiness. To completion. In the fear of God. That's exactly the same spirit.
- Isn't it? As these verses in front of us. But how much more so. For us. Who are being redeemed. Not with silver and gold. But with the precious blood. Of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- [25 : 18] Be holy. In all your conduct. Says Peter. Conduct yourselves. With reverent fear. All the time. Of your exile. Here on earth. As we await. The coming. Of the Lord Jesus.
- See friends. The call to Christian faith. Is the call. To deadly. Serious. Consecration. To separation. To set. Apartness. From the ways.
- Of this world. From the peoples. Of the lands. Who don't know God. And who are naturally opposed to God. And defiant. For the Lord. Our master.
- There's a great. Necessary negative. At the very heart. Of the Christian faith. And it. Is there. All the way through the Bible. From beginning to end. The Lord Jesus put it very.
- Distinctly. Didn't he? If anyone would follow me. Let him deny himself. And take up his cross. Daily. And come. And follow me. Follow me on a road.
- [26 : 20] That the world. Despises. We need to take that seriously. Don't we? Because today. There's a great. Desire.

Understandably. To make the Christian message. A positive message. And of course. It is. The most positive. Good news. That this world. Could ever. Ever hear. But the gospel. Is also.

A message of bad news. Isn't it? It's bad news for sin. It's bad news. For sinful desires. It's bad news. For sinful thinking. Bad news. For sinful actions. Because it demands.

An end. It demands. That we abandon all of that. Forever. To follow Jesus. We take our orders. No longer from the world. But from the word of God.

If you're my friend. Says Jesus. You'll do what I command you. If anyone loves me. He will keep. My word. Not the world's word. And that will always put us.

[27 : 15] At odds. With the way of this world. The peoples of the lands. Right about us. Look at the two things. Singled out here. In verses 30 and 31.

As obviously. Contemporary issues. For Nehemiah's time. There are also things. That are singled out. In the New Testament. And are just as contemporary. Today. It's God's people's attitudes. Which are to be.

Radically different. From the world. In matters of. Marriage. And in material matters. Verse 30. Speaks about a separation.

To exclusively. Holy. Sexual. Relationships. Not with the peoples of the land. Or indeed. Not like the peoples of the lands. Now again.

The reason is not racial. But it's religious. Deuteronomy chapter 7. And many other places. Make it very plain. Don't go that way. Says the Lord. Or these partnerships. Will take you away.

[28 : 10] From the Lord. Your God. God. That's exactly. What Paul is saying. In that passage. I quoted from. In 2nd Corinthians. He goes on to say. Don't be.

Unequally yoked. With unbelievers. In this area of life. Or in any area of life. It is the road. To certain ruin. Now you don't believe that.

Some of you. So let me say it again. It is the road. To certain ruin. Of your faith. According to the word of God. Now Christian believers. We are different.

We know that marriage. And sexual relationships. And by the way. Marriage and sexual relationships. Are two. Are one and the same thing. In the Bible. It's the same way. Of talking about the same thing. A sexual relationship.

Is a marriage relationship. A marriage relationship. Is a sexual relationship. Nothing else. But we know. That that is a gift. That God gives us.

[29 : 05] For the service. Of his kingdom. Genesis 2 alone. Makes that absolutely plain. It's given to glorify God. In his way. In his purposes. So we're never to think about these things.

As the world does. Perversely. Or just selfishly. We've made the God Eros. The God of our modern worship. Western culture today.

Haven't we? It's worshipped everywhere. Constantly. And how utterly confused. How utterly corrupted. Our world has become in this area. In fact. Increasingly absurdly so.

We've now got the situation. Where. The feminist gurus. Of the 60s and 70s. Jermaine Greer. And these others. Who wanted to obliterate. All gender distinctions completely.

They're now at loggerheads. With today's advocates. Of gender fluidity. Who want to. Exalt gender differentiation. As the most important thing. In the world. So important.

[30 : 01] That even your mind's. Perception of gender. Can be so real. That you have to. Mutilate your body. To bring it into line. With the latest idea. Of your mind. How extraordinary.

That is. God help us. What a terrible time bomb. We're storing up. For the future of our children. We. We always hear these days. Don't we. About misselling scandals. Friends.

This is going to be the biggest. Misselling scandal. Of them all. In 20. 30 years time. Such vulnerable people. Such needy people. Young kids.

Who are so easily led. So easily misled. That's what happens. When. We follow the world's thinking. About sexuality. And not God's.

No. God's people are not to think. As the world does. Because we have a far better. A far healthier. A far more joyful. A more satisfying understanding.

[30 : 56] Of these God ordained relationships. For human beings. And we must be set apart. For that. As Hebrews 13 says. Let marriage.

Be held in honor. By all. And let the marriage bed. Be undefiled. For God will judge. The sexually immoral. And the adulterer. And then the very next verse.

Goes on to say this. Keep your life free. From the love of money. Be content. With what you have. For I will never leave you. Nor forsake you. Isn't it striking.

That the next verse here. Also. Goes on to talk exactly. About material matters. Because. God's people are not to have. The world's attitude.

To sexual gratification. Or the world's attitude. To material gratification. And the Sabbath principle. In the Bible. Is all about. Our attitude. To material things. There's a whole raft.

[31 : 51] Of teaching. About the Sabbath patterns. That are to. To permeate. The whole of the life. Of the people of God. But. You can see it. Even just in the two things. That are mentioned here. The Sabbath day. Every week.

And the Sabbath year. Every seventh year. You can read about those. In Leviticus 25. And Deuteronomy 15. And other places. But every seventh year. You are not to work your land.

You and the land. Both. Were to have a sabbatical. And God said. Leave the produce of the land. For the poor. The widow. The orphan. The fatherless. There'll be enough also. For you to eat. But just not enough.

To turn a handsome prophet. That year. And every debt. You'll forgive in that year. Every indentured slave. Or laborer. Who's yours. You'll let them go free. What is that. Law telling us.

It's telling us. That for God's people. There is far. Far more to life. Than just material gain. God's people are not. To live as slaves.

[32 : 46] To material things. We're not to be greed given. Driven. We're not to be gain driven. We're to be grace driven people. We're to be full of gratitude. For everything that God provides.

And we're to trust God. That he will provide what we need. We're not to be anxiously. Constantly toiling. For all the things. We think we need. All the things we want. The things we're determined to have.

Even. If it means. Great. Exploitation of others. That's the world's way. Isn't it? Verse 31.

The peoples of the lands. Slave at their work. Seven days a week. Relentlessly. Buying and selling. Year in. Year out. But God's people. Get a holiday.

A holy day. Every single week. And sabbaticals. Every seventh year. Because there are far more important things. For God's people.

[33 : 42] Than worldly gain. I find it so strange. When Christians. Seem to have a terrible bee in their bonnet. About not being legalistic. About the sabbath day.

I don't want to be in bondage. To a sabbath day. I mean. That's like saying. I don't want to be in bondage. To holidays. I'm not going to have holidays. I'm not going to have that terrible burden. So legalistic.

No. I'm going to work every single day of the year. How many people do you know who say that? Let's go back to the bondage of Egypt. Said the Israelites. We didn't have to have sabbath days there.

We could work every single day. We could work ourselves to an early grave. Let's go. It's great. Back in Egypt. It's free people. Says the Lord. Who get sabbaths.

Isn't the human heart so absolutely perverse? But you see. We are. Aren't we? We're so easily blinded. By material things. And we need to ask if there is really an obvious separation.

[34 : 42] A separateness about our lives as believers. A difference from the world around in this whole area of striving after material gain. Chasing it as though it really were all there was in life.

And forgetting about the one who has promised never to leave us or forsake us. To give us all that we need. All the peoples of the world slave after things.

Says Jesus in Luke chapter 12. And your father knows that you need them. But instead seek his kingdom and these things will be added to you. It's in vain.

Says the psalmist. That you eat the bread of anxious toil. For he gives his beloved sleep. And he gives his beloved sabbath. Joy.

Liberation. Throughout our lives. Not to slave. Mercilessly. For the material. To be content with what we have. Because we have him.

[35 : 45] And he'll never leave us or forsake us. But if that's so. Then surely there will be some visible and tangible signs. That mark us out from the rest of the world.

Won't there? And I think how we think about. And how we use our Christian Sunday. The Lord's. I think that will be one of these things. Of course there's a legalistic sabbatarianism.

That can be destructive and miserable. And there has been in parts of Scotland. In the past. And perhaps even today. But you can take any of God's good commands. And pervert them. And make a legalistic bondage out of them.

It doesn't mean the command isn't right. There is surely. Isn't there a good and a holy determination. For God's people.

To receive thankfully the joy of his rest. And to honor him for it. And to use it for his glory. Not just for our selfishness. Not to exploit it for ourselves. But to use it for his glory.

[36 : 41] And for his people. I think our attitude to Sundays. Actually does tell us a lot about. How enthralled to materialism that we are. You need to ask yourself these questions.

Don't we? Are you pursuing always those extra shifts. Which are on Sundays. Because you get paid more. And it will get you more of the things you want. Are you running your business. Seven days a week. Relentlessly.

To build things up. So you can have success. And feel you've achieved. Are you studying. All these extra hours on a Sunday. So you can get better marks. And a better degree. And get further on in your life.

Or whatever it might be. Are you doing these things. At the expense of. Attention to God. And to his people. And fellowship with them.

Perhaps giving to them. Through hospitality. Serving them. Through helping in some ministry. Or whatever it might be. Ask yourself. Is my treasure. That what I'm chasing.

[37 : 35] Is it telling others. As well as me. And the Lord. Where my heart actually is. Perhaps throughout my life.

It's telling that I'm not really content. With what I have. That I want more. Of these things. Than actually. I want God. Perhaps we should all just go home.

And read Luke chapter 12 again. Can't do us any harm. Can it? Because where there is. Real obedience of faith. And trust in God. His people will be. Markedly.

And visibly different. Distinct. From the peoples of the land. Not least. In our wholehearted embrace. Of God's true purpose. For sexuality. But also.

In our joyful embrace. Of God's. Liberating patterns. Of Sabbath. That free us. From bondage. To the material world. In every aspect of our life. Meaningful separation.

[38 : 32] That speaks of a consecration. Of real seriousness. And there will also be. I think. As we see in verses 32 to 39.

There will also be people. Marked by real sacrifice. That speaks of the cost. Of the real stewardship. That we have. Of God's kingdom. Until the Lord comes.

God's people. In every age. Have been given. The stewardship. Of his earthly kingdom. Paul says. Israel of old. Was entrusted. With the oracles of God. And in just the same way. He says that we.

In the Christian church. Are entrusted. To be stewards. Of the mysteries of God. To make his kingdom known. And he says. It's required of stewards. That they be found. Faithful to that trust. That is that we are.

Seeking first. The kingdom of God. In all things. And it's therefore. Inevitable. That a key sign. Of real. Spiritual reformation. And renewal. And real faith. Is going to be.

[39 : 29] That that becomes. Our number one priority. As it was here. Verse 32. The service. Of the house. Of our God. Is a priority. Verse 33.

The work. Of the house of our God. Again and again. All through these verses. That's the phrase. Until you get to verse 39. We will not neglect. The house of our God.

And if you look at what that meant. In terms of financial outlay. For these people. It was a very considerable. And meaningful sacrifice. Wasn't it? Because the principle.

Described here. Is that which. All through the Bible. We get very very clearly. Indeed. And that is that. The first. Of our possessions. And the best.

Of our possessions. Is not for ourselves. But for the Lord our God. It's a radically different. Understanding. Isn't it? Of our mysterious substance.

[40 : 23] From the understanding. Of the world. And that's because. God's people know. That everything that we have. Is a gift of his grace. It all belongs to him. And we're called to be.

Good stewards. Of the varied graces. That he gives us. In order that in everything. God himself. Should be glorified. We will not neglect. The work of the house of God.

That's what their. Spirit inspired Bible study. Had taught them. In Nehemiah's day. And it given them. Renewed vigor. In totally. Reprioritizing. Their spending patterns.

Away from themselves. And for. The work. Of the kingdom of God. Because they become. A truly worshipping people. That is real worship of God. Isn't it?

Not neglecting. But enabling. And doing. And paying for. The work. Of God's household. In their day. Of course. It was the temple. That was the one place. Where the living God. Could be encountered.

[41 : 18] Here on earth. But today. Of course. It's the work of Christ's church. Where. The living temple of God. All around the world. Is bringing people. Into encounter. With the living God. As they come among them.

And hear his word. His gospel. Proclaimed. And of course. All of that work. Too. Has to be paid for. The New Testament. Apostles. Are just as clear. Aren't they? Just read.

First Corinthians 16. Or second Corinthians 8 and 9. Perhaps you read it. During the offering. As examples. And. The obligation here. In verse 32. This so-called temple tax.

When that's spoken of. In Exodus chapter 30. It is called two things. On the one hand. It is an offering to God. But on the other hand. It is for the service. Of the work of the temple.

And that's exactly. What Paul says. In Philippians chapter 4. About the funding. Of his ministry work. By those Macedonian Christians. As being a fragrant offering.

[42 : 14] To the living God. Well of course it is. Because. God doesn't need our money. Does he? But the work of his earthly church. Does need money. And nothing gives such joy.

To our father in heaven. As giving. That enables. The gospel of Jesus Christ. To be made known. So that his name. Will be praised. And responded to. And loved. And worshipped. So what does that say to us then.

As a congregation. Today. Well surely. If we're a congregation. Where there's real faith. Obedient faith. Like here. Everyone.

Will be committed. To providing for the work. Of the house of God. Everyone will be saying. We will not neglect. The work. Of the house of our God.

Whatever else will suffer. That must not suffer. The gospel. And Christ's kingdom. Must come first. That's what. We all promise. Isn't it? We'll hear it again tonight.

[43 : 10] When you members say. That we promise. To give a fitting proportion. Of our time. Our talents. And our money. For the church's work. In the world. What is a fitting proportion?

Well again. Lots of Christians today. Are very very unwilling. To even use the word tithe. Aren't they? Well it's not a New Testament word. Well that's true.

There's no talk of giving. In the New Testament. Anywhere. That remotely conceives. That Christian giving. Gospel giving. Should be anything like. So limited. As a mere tithe. That's the truth.

It's not even limited. To a mere 10%. Here is it. Look. Verse 37. There's a set amount. Everybody pays. The third shekel. Whether you're rich or poor alike. And verse 34. There's the wood offerings.

Very practical. Verse 36. The first part of. Everything from the ground. And the tree. And. The firstborn of sons. You didn't actually give your sons.

[44 : 07] You paid a ransom for them. But you did give. Every firstborn of your cattle. Your sheep. Your beasts. Everything. And verse 37. Not just the raw materials. The dough. The wine.

The oil. The first and the best. To God. And. The plain old tithes. That the Levites collected. From the land. That's quite a lot of stuff. Isn't it? That sounds a lot more.

Like. The Macedonian Christians. Of modest means. That Paul writes about. And by the way. He's writing to the Corinthian church. To shame them. That wealthy. Metropolitan congregation. But these poor Macedonians.

Begged. He says. To give. And they gave way. Beyond their means. To the Lord. To fund. Paul's work. Of gospel mission. And he says. Their abundance of joy.

And poverty. Overflowed. In a wealth of generosity. They gave. And they gave. And they gave again. Because they loved Christ. And they loved his kingdom. And they trusted him.

[45 : 06] To provide for their needs. They were giving to the needy. As Jesus taught. And so providing themselves. As Jesus said. With money bags. That don't grow old.

And treasure in heaven. That will never fail. That's the pattern. Isn't it? For the church of Jesus Christ. Are we doing that?

Are we. Determinedly. Organizing ourselves. Personally. Notice how determined. And organized all of this is here. To make sure. That giving happens. To make sure.

That we don't neglect. The ministries that God has given us. Many of us are doing that. I know. But not all of us are doing that. I keep out completely.

I have nothing to do with the. The money. I don't know what anybody gives. I keep right out of all of that. But I did recently ask. For some general information. And I was rather ashamed.

[46 : 07] I was told. And this was. Something that made my heart joyful. That there are many among us. Some even school children. Students. Others with very little. Who give. Enormously liberally.

Out of the little that they have. But I was also told. That there are many. Professionals. People. Must be earning into the thousands of pounds. Monthly. Or giving just a few.

Tens of pounds. Just like these. Poor ones. I was told. There are many people among us. Even church members. Who never give anything regularly at all. In an organized way. I was told.

There were people. Who talk. Sometimes a lot about. Wanting to give very generously. But never actually get around to ever doing it. I just leave those facts with you. To ponder carefully.

And I echo Paul. The apostle. He said. Each must give. As he has made up his mind. Not reluctantly. Not under compulsion. But God loves a cheerful giver.

[47 : 03] God wants us. To want to give. But Paul also did add. Whoever sows sparingly. Will reap sparingly. And whoever sows bountifully.

Will reap bountifully. We want. Don't we. To reap. Bountifully. An eternal harvest. Of fruit. For the kingdom of God. We want to see the kingdom.

Growing. More and more. In Glasgow. And all over the world. How much. More worship of God. There could be. If throughout our city. Throughout our land.

Christians. Gave. Even. With the level. Of this Old Testament. Gratitude. For the grace. That they'd received. How much more. Should our gratitude be.

Who have received in Christ. All things. Who though he was rich. For our sakes. Became poor. That we through his poverty. Might become rich. Beyond compare.

[47 : 59] Friends. Let's bind ourselves together. As God's people today. With a meaningful seal. To be a people. Who will not neglect. The house of our God. Committed.

To being meaningfully different. From the world around us. In the world. But not of it. Seeing marriage. Sexual relationships. Family life. Not for ourselves. Not selfishly.

But as God's gift. For the service. Of his kingdom. Not competing. With church life. But serving church life. Having open homes. Inviting in. Sharing.

All that we have. Whether we're few or many. Seeing material things. All of it. In the same way. For his kingdom. Rejoicing. In the gifts that God gives us.

The gift of his Lord's day. To use it. To glorify him. And bless others. And determinedly. Not neglecting. The financial needs. Of gospel ministry.

[48 : 53] All over the world. Giving. Because. We do. Trust God. And we test that trust. By actually doing it.

Paul says. You will be enriched. In every way. For all your generosity. Which will produce. Thanksgiving to God. Jesus says to us.

Seek. First. The kingdom of God. And these things. That you worry about. So much. They'll be added to you. All that you need. And because he says that.

We can say. Can't we? Therefore. We will not neglect. The house of our God. Let's pray together.

Amen. Heavenly Father. We want to be a people.

[49 : 50] Committed. To you. We want to be a people. Consecrated. Set apart. As you have set us to be. Truly different. Liberated.

Joyfully. From all that this world. Chases after. And seeks to own. But in the end. Turns to dust and ashes. And we want Lord.

To be. People. Who in every respect. Seek first. Your kingdom. And its righteousness. A people who reflect.

Your generous giving to us. Of grace. And abundant grace. Help us. We pray. We are so weak.

So easily lured. By this world. Help us. To help one another. And as tonight. We have the joy.

[50 : 47] Of welcoming. New members. To our midst. And seeing many. Baptized. Turning their back. On our former life. And turning towards. Your kingdom of light. Etched.

Deep into our hearts. Lord. The truth. All these. Other things. Are as nothing. Compared to the. Surpassing glory.

Of knowing Christ. And having our names. Sealed. In his everlasting kingdom. Help us. To help one another.

As we follow you together. Until that day. For Jesus sake. Amen.