

Response to Presbytery Report

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Just before we pray this morning, there's one or two things I need to say. On Wednesday evening, the prayer meeting, we were asking you to pray for the forthcoming meeting of the Press Fair of Glasgow, which will take place on Tuesday night, and for the expected report of the special committee under the convenership of David Lunen, which we'll be reporting with recommendations about the future of our building here.

And I do want you all, I do want to ask you all to pray for that meeting. Since Wednesday, we've now seen the report which will go before presbytery on Tuesday.

And I'm afraid I have to say to you, it's very disappointing indeed. It's a report marked by falsehood and fantasy and enmity.

Falsehood, repeating all kinds of evil against us falsely. Fantasy, making the most grandiose claims as to what wonderful, vibrant ministry we'll be able to flourish in this building if we are removed from it.

And enmity. We sang a hymn last Sunday morning about smiling foes, and this report waxes eloquent about how greatly they respect the tradition of conservative evangelical preaching at St. George's Tron.

[1 : 28] And yet concludes that the only way of preserving such a tradition is to eject this congregation from that building. They adore the idea of having a vibrant, living, evangelical ministry here within the Church of Scotland.

But when faced with a real ministry and congregation like that, in practice, it seems they're determined to destroy it. Like the religious leaders, really, that Jesus spoke of, who venerated the tombs of the prophets, but flogged and murdered the living prophets.

Friends, none of this should surprise us. Since the day that most of you were faced here with a delegation from Presbytery and from 121 George Street, you've seen and you know what we've been dealing with.

A perpetual enmity that rails against the living gospel of the real Jesus Christ and his true church. When we need to open our Bibles and read to recognize that.

Just think of the words we've just read a moment ago. Now, we mustn't prejudge the issue. Presbytery on Tuesday night can reject this report, but I have to tell you that I think that seems extremely unlikely.

[2 : 44] And so, barring an intervention of God, that means that we must be prepared for the fact that we must soon be forced out of this building where we meet.

And where we so delight to share the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may also be that the family and I are forced to leave the manse. And that we as a church may lose all of our other assets as well.

These things are more complicated. We may have a better legal defense for some of these things. Although, it does seem that the Scottish charity regulator has tended to side with the Church of Scotland view.

But as I say, that's still complex. But the deliverances being urged upon Presbytery on Tuesday night include taking further legal action without delay to dispossess us of these things.

As you know, there's already legal action underway personally against myself and Richard Henry, our Session Clerk and Margot Logier, our treasurer. Now, none of us can find this easy.

[3 : 52] And I think I can fairly say that there won't be too many who find it harder than I do. But let us just together consider this. We are discovering together what real Christian discipleship means.

Because we are learning to tread where our Lord Jesus Christ trod. If anyone would come after me, he said, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

But he also said, everyone, everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my namesake will receive a hundredfold.

And will inherit eternal life. And we believe that, don't we? And we're going to test it in a very tangible way, it seems.

It may surprise you, therefore, for me to tell you that our elders meeting yesterday morning where we considered this report and its implications was, I think, the most encouraging elders meeting that we have ever had.

[5 : 10] Of course, it began somber as we read the report together. But I must tell you that it ended with our hearts full of hope and joy.

And our minds focused on the future. And our hearts thrilled at the prospects of the future. Because the Lord is opening up through this great opportunities for us.

For the advancement of our gospel outreach. For the expansion and the growth of our ministry. And not for its decline. And we hope that over the next month or two, we will be able to share in much more detail some of that excitement with you.

We truly believe that this opposition is God's opportunity for the next stage of our corporate mission together as a fellowship. It was the persecution, do you remember, against the church in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 7.

That was the birth of the spreading missionary church. Saul was ravaging the church, we read. Therefore, those who were scattered went about proclaiming the word.

[6 : 21] And it was through that that the kingdom of God advanced and grew mightily. So, fear not, little flock.

For it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom. That is what the Lord Jesus said. We don't need to be anxious about what we're to eat or drink or where we're to live or indeed where we're to meet.

Our Heavenly Father knows that we need these things. Instead, seek first his kingdom. And these things will be added to you, says the Lord Jesus.

And we know, don't we, that we can trust him? So, let's draw near to him now in the quietness of this moment. And just lift our hearts together to him, our Lord and our Savior and our King in prayer.

Let us pray. Lord, our hearts are sad and heavy. Not so much with our loss.

[7 : 26] But at the dreadful hatred and enmity of people who want to shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. Neither entering themselves nor wanting to allow others to enter.

Who love the form of godliness. The trappings of religion. But deny utterly its power. And therefore deny its person, the real and living Lord Jesus Christ.

Have mercy, Lord. Have mercy. And those who would refuse to minister, even to the least of your brethren.

And so, we'll find that they have been heaping scorn and abuse upon you. Who loves everyone who bears shame for the sake of your name. And have mercy on us, O Lord.

We pray in our distress and in our pain, this place is dear to us. It's dear to us in a myriad of ways. And we've poured out our substance these recent years to fit it for your service.

[8 : 40] And yet, Lord, that which we have lavished upon this place was not for us. It was not for this building, even. It was for you, our Lord and our Savior.

And it was out of love to you. And if now that should seem but a waste to so many. Remind us, Lord, that like the ointment poured on your feet by Mary.

Nothing, nothing so done out of love to you is ever a waste to you. But remains a beautiful thing in your eyes. So, receive our love, O Christ, our God.

And help us through whatever path we now must tread. Help us to love you more, not less. And remind us, Lord, constantly of your words of strength and of power.

When you say to us, blessed are you when others revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad.

[9 : 55] For your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. So, Lord, look upon us.

As men do, whatever your hand and your plan has predestined to take place. And grant us, your servants, to go on speaking your word with boldness.

While you stretch out your hand to do wonders through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. For you alone are the king.

And the judge of us and of all men. And in that truth, we rest our souls in peace.

And we look to you for our salvation. And this we pray in Jesus Christ, our Savior's name. Amen.