

Jesus Christ Is Lord - Lord of the Church (1)

by J. Glyn Owen

Jesus Christ is Lord, and his lordship has implications for the church and for individual believers.

Duration: 1:01:25

Scripture: Lamentations 3:22

Topics: "Lord"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the infinite love of God towards His people. He describes how God chose and loved His people even when they were in a state of sin and unworthiness. The preacher highlights the continuity of God's love, stating that it is the reason why the church still exists today. He compares the love of God to a love story, stating that Jesus Christ went to great lengths and made sacrifices to win His bride, the church. The preacher concludes by emphasizing the lordship of Jesus Christ and the need for believers to submit to His authority.

Transcript

It's a joy to see you all this morning and to be present again in the House of the Lord. May I say it's particularly happy to see a number in the congregation who have recently been unwell and whom the Lord has granted to be out among us again. We are very, very happy to see you.

May the Lord's grace be upon you and upon each of us according to our needs. Now, you will remember our theme on these Lord's Day mornings. We have taken the basic, the cardinal Christian affirmation, Jesus Christ is Lord.

We have already seen how Jesus employed that highest of all designations with reference to himself. Unblushingly, he accepted the title given to the Jehovah of the Old Testament, even given to the emperor, the Roman emperor of his day. He accepted it and his disciples came almost naturally to concede to him the prerogatives of deity and of sovereignty that were implicit in the title Lord.

Last Sunday morning we considered how Jesus is Lord of the universe. Now, you may have thought that we were starting at the wrong end of things, but it was deliberately done. I wanted right at the, or almost at the beginning of this series, to establish the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord of the universe in which we live.

And then to come down to the particulars, to the application of that principle, first of all, and this morning to the church, later on to every phase and facet of our individual lives. And if you're prepared to face the

challenge of this teaching of the scriptures, then I will forewarn you what we are going to see as we face the logic and the implications of the affirmation that Jesus Christ is Lord is this. We are going to discover, many of us to our consternation, that there is simply nothing that we have or are or hope to be but that it belongs to him.

And we are left in our utter nakedness, unable to claim anything for ourselves and forced to acknowledge what we have, what we possess, what we are by the grace of God, and what we hope to be materially, spiritually, or in any other sense, ultimately belongs to him. Jesus Christ is Lord. Now at this stage in the series, we are involved with things that are very much doctrinal.

We are coming to the things that are exceedingly practical. But I want you to see the practical in the light of the teaching of scripture. And I don't want to come to the practical issues directly.

I want us to see that the Bible makes it quite clear that the Jesus Christ, who is my Savior and yours, if we trust him and believe in him, is really Lord. And you cannot be a Christian, and you cannot serve him in this world unless you acknowledge that he is Lord. If you shall confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.

But to the person who comes into church service such as this, just to salute Jesus of Nazareth, there is no salvation. Salvation is offered in the New Testament to men and women and boys and girls who are prepared to bow, to bend, to yield, to yield obeisance, worship, faith, love, obedience, not to the man of Nazareth merely, but to the man of Nazareth who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and is never going to abdicate that position. Now this morning then, the aspect of the subject to which we come is that Jesus is Lord of the church.

In coming to this subject, one is faced with an alternative. Either one takes one of the metaphors of the church and deal with it at some considerable length and in detail, or one is going take a bird's eye view and try to get the whole picture. That's what I would like to do, but time doesn't allow us.

But I'm going to take two biblical metaphors this morning. They're quite different, though basically they say the same thing. They're quite different, but what they're going to teach us is this, that Jesus is Lord of the church.

I'm not Lord, the session is not Lord, the presbytery is not Lord, the general assembly of the Presbyterian church is not Lord, the conference of any other church is not Lord. There is only one head of the church, and that head is Jesus Christ, the eternal son of the living God, the Lord of Lords. And I trust that you and I will know what it is to acknowledge him in our hearts, that primacy which belongs exclusively to himself.

Now the two images, of the two images I'm going to take this morning, the first is that of Jesus as the builder of the church, the builder of the church viewed as his ecclesia. I'm deliberately using that Greek word, not to show off my little bit of Greek, but because I think you will see in a few moments it's quite important to use it. Now the basic passage, or a key passage, where this is taught is in Matthew chapter 16 verses 13 to 18.

You remember the familiar situation. Jesus asked his disciples, who do men say that I the son of man am? They offered certain replies. Then he becomes very personal and he looks those men in the eye and he says, but what about you? Who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

Jesus replied, blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my father in hell. And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Now I want you to notice the image employed for the church there.

I will build, says Jesus, in the King James version, my church. I will build my church. The same in the NIV.

But the Greek word is ekklesia. Now this word has an ancestry. Its roots go back into two separate soils, a Greek soil and a Hebrew soil.

As far as the Greek soil is concerned, this word ekklesia simply means an assembly. By an assembly is meant people convened, people gathered together. It may be a political assembly.

That tempts me, but I won't yield to temptation. It may be a legal assembly, it may be an assembly of any kind. Does not necessarily need to have a religious connotation at all, but it's an assembly of people who've been summoned together, they've been brought together.

Their complexion may be this, that, or the other, but they've just been gathered together, they've just been convened. As a matter of fact, the word is used three times in Acts 19 in this sense, and if you read that chapter you will find that in Ephesus a whole concourse of people have gathered in order to find fault with and to try to harass the Apostle Paul and those who are preaching the gospel with him. We read in verses 32, 39, and 41 these words.

The assembly was in confusion. Now it's a crowd gathered in the streets. Some were shouting one thing, some another.

Most of the people did not know why they were there, but they were there. Then in verse 39, if there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. The word is ecclesia.

And then in verse 41, after he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. Now that is the term against its Greek background. It simply means a group of people gathered together.

They may be on a football field, they may be in a political arena, they may be anywhere. They've just been convened, that's the main thing, an assembly of people. Now when the writers of our New Testament employed that term to describe what we speak of as the church, of course they had that thought in mind.

But I want you to see as we go on that there is something entirely different that comes into the concept of the church as being an assembly. It is not enough to say that the church is an assembly, we have to qualify it. We'll come to that in a moment.

But before we do, what does it mean to be an assembly? What does it mean to be the church? Now fortunately this term, this word ecclesia, opens up like a, and you can dissect it very much as a botanist would dissect a flower. Right at its heart is another little word, ecclesia, and at its heart is the word clasis, trimmed up a little bit to fit into the compound word. Clasis.

The word clasis means calling, or a summons, or an invitation if you like. An ecclesia is composed of men and women, boys and girls, old and young, who have been summoned, they've been called, they've been brought together. Someone has announced something and in virtue of the announcement they have been brought together and that constitutes them an ecclesia.

This is very much of course the same as in the old testament. Abraham was called to be the father of the faithful. Abraham didn't just decide to leave the religion of his father and of his mother and to leave his kith and kin and go into another country he knew not where.

He was called. He was summoned. Now that is true of every member of the Christian church, a man or a woman, old or young, he has been summoned, he or she has been called, he's been invited.

You belong to the Christian church, the church of Jesus Christ, by invitation only. No man is born in the Christian church. You may be born in a Christian home and therefore you may have certain advantages that ought in turn to help you to become a Christian, but you're not born into the Christian church.

You have to be born again to come into the Christian church. You come into it by invitation only. The head of the church by the word of his gospel and the spirit of the holy one calls so that every Christian man and woman has to say, has to confess in one way or another, I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and live.

A calling. Not only is it a calling, but it is a calling out of something. The first two letters, in the word ecclesia, mean out of.

And every Christian whom Jesus calls to be a member of the ecclesia, every individual whom he calls to become a Christian in the ecclesia, is called out of, out of darkness into light. Out of no faith into faith. Out of rebellion into obedience.

Out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Out from under the dominion of Satan into the liberty of the children of God. Again, you have your old Testament analogies.

Hosea 11 one says, when Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt, I called my son. Out of. Israel had to make her exit from under the yoke of the Pharaohs in order to be constituted the Lord's covenant people on the slopes of Sinai, constituted by blood and by the word that God gave.

Now, let me repeat. Every individual that constitutes the ecclesia has not only been summoned, but summoned out of. So the question is not, have you heard the voice of Jesus calling you, but have you heeded that voice and come out of every opposing tyranny that would claim your absolute allegiance to the Lord Jesus.

Thirdly, not only is everyone called, called out of, but called to belong to the one who calls us. Now this is the distinctively Hebrew flavor to the word ecclesia in Greek. It is simply an ecclesia can belong to anybody.

As I've indicated political or any other flavor, give it any flavor you like. Anybody can gather a group together, but in the old Testament, whenever you find this word and in the new Testament, it has this added significance. Christians are not just simply an assembly of any kind of people, but they are an assembly of people who have been called, called out of every other dominion over them from under every dominion in order to belong to the one who calls.

Now you may have sometimes wondered why is it that we have this word church, both in the King James and in the NIV, you know, the word church doesn't really mean assembly at all. I know some of you have grappled with this because some of you have mentioned it to me. Why did the translators of the King James version, for example, going back all that far, why did they translate this word ecclesia by another

word coming from another root altogether? Sorry to be involved with grammar this morning.

Why did they do it? The word church comes from an entirely different base, probably from the Byzantine Greek meaning belonging to the Lord. And the emphasis there is underlying the word church. The emphasis is this concept of belonging to someone.

Well, the point is, you see that in the old Testament, whenever this word is used of Israel, it refers to her not just as a gathering of people, but a gathering of people belonging to God, to Jehovah, to the almighty God. And in the new Testament, the term ecclesia has that same flavor. It constitutes a people who belong and belong to their Lord.

And the translators of the King James version and evidently of the NIV thought that that was sufficiently important to introduce this word church here, which really is no translation of word ecclesia at all, but it adds this flavor to it. And it is lost in, in, in this main flavor that is given it. It's not just an assembly, not just that we've been called, but we've been called to be the Lord.

Can you see the point? Can you see the Lord chip going out? You're not just a person who's had a little bit of experience of God. You're not just simply a person that has been washed in the blood of Christ. All this is involved.

You're not just a person that has known something of the ministry of the Holy spirit. All that is involved, but listen, friend, you've been called to belong to belong. You are not your own.

You're bought with a price called, called out, called to belong to the one who calls. And then in, so in being thus called, we are called together and being called out of and called to belong to the Lord of the church. The ecclesia is necessarily called together as a new community.

And of course that emerged in the new Testament in a very wonderful way. The story of which one is never tired of reading in the book of acts. But let's, let's not forget this, that it didn't end with a book of acts.

When Peter came to write his first epistle, he says something which half the church of the 20th century have forgotten. Or should I say half the Christians of the 20th century have forgotten? You know what he said? As you come to him, I'm quoting from one Peter two, four, and five. As you come to him, the living stone, that is Jesus Christ rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him.

You also as living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. And you see the point? Everyone whom Jesus calls to himself, he builds into the church, builds into the church. Have you been built into the church? Many people want to be lone Christians, lone wolves.

You know, you, you should never be a lone Christian. You should always belong to the church because poor Peter says, if you're coming to Christ, he's building you in. If he's building you in, you should acknowledge it.

Take your place with the people of God. They may not be as worthy as you are. You may find that they're not up to the standard you'd like them to be.

My friend, your coming won't take it down very much. It may build it up, but because this is the pattern in scripture, God expects that everyone who is called is built into, into the fabric. And he says, Jesus is doing

that.

And if Jesus is not doing that, it is only because people are rebellious against the concept of God and of his church. I remember my last visit, I think it was to the United Kingdom. I was out for a walk one day.

I came across a group of builders. They were involved doing something or other. I'm not sure what they were building, but there were two squads of men.

One squad was actually involved in the building, but then there were two or three men. They were dismantling an old building. And I watched them for a while.

And what they were doing is this. They were salvaging bricks from the old building in order to incorporate them in the new. And I watched the process.

They got the bricks as whole as they could. Generally they managed it very well. And then they put them in a pile.

And then one man was just getting rid of the old cement that was clinging to the old bricks. So as to clean up the old bricks and the old cement in order to incorporate them in the, in the new wall, in the new building. Brothers and sisters, this is a process that goes on spiritually.

You and I are taken out of the old building of the Adamic stock. And the cement, the things that made us stick, made us cling to the old life, God, by His Spirit and His Word and in the fellowship of His people, gradually gets rid of the old cement. He strips us down to cling, to put new cement upon us that enables us to cling to one another.

He builds us in. Have you been built in? Are you a loner this morning? God sets the solitary in families and He wants you to know something of the belonging, a sense of belonging to the family of God. He wants to build you in.

Don't sin. Don't run away. Now there are other concepts here.

I can't add any more or I shall never be able to come to the other one I want to refer to. The one other point that I can just refer to is in being called together, we are being called for a purpose. That comes out in the passage in, in, in Matthew chapter 26, uh, chapter 16.

We are called for a purpose. God has something for His church to do and to do together, to do as an army, to do as a people who belong. Now, can you see the implications of lordship here? You don't belong to this entity until you're called.

See, we are dead in trespasses and sins by nature. We are literally spiritually dead. Oh, we may love a little bit of religion that we can form and fashion after our own ideas.

We don't mind doing that. You add one doctrinal tenet and I add another, and it gives us a sense of achievement. This is our church.

This is what we believe. This is our charter. This is our church.

This is my institution. God have mercy on us. That's not the church.

The charter is given. The terms are set. There is a lord to the church before it was founded.

And if you are in the church, you've been called by the head of the church, by the power of the spirit and the proclamation of His word. You've been called in and you've been called out of. And if you haven't come out, you can't come in.

There must be a coming out in order to come in. Many people don't become members of Christ because they're not prepared to turn their backs upon the unbelieving, hostile, evil, pornographic world. My friend, you've got to leave that world.

If you would be sad, you've got to turn your back on Sodom, ancient and modern, and to come into Christ. And He becomes your sphere of living. And don't tease yourself.

Don't tease yourself by any form of ratiocination or rationalism that you can belong to the two worlds because you cannot. You've got to cross a line and you've got to say no to the world, hands off. You've got to say yes to Jesus Christ.

You shall. He's Lord. He's the builder.

He sets the terms. He is Lord. He's not just another member with whom we conferred about things from time to time.

He's the Lord. Now come with me to the next. Jesus is the bridegroom or the husband of the church which is viewed as his bride.

You encounter this image. Excuse me. That's what comes of getting excited, isn't it? Well, praise the Lord.

Now, you encounter this image in a number of places in the New Testament. It's found actually in the Old. Now, way back in Isaiah chapter 62, we are told that God was Israel's husband.

I am your husband, says the Lord. John the Baptist was the first to introduce it into the New Testament. I'm not going after the details this morning, but then Jesus himself took it up and used it in a number of places.

For example, when John the Baptist was a little bit puzzled that Jesus and his disciples didn't fast, Jesus told his disciples to tell John, how can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them. Then will they fast. You see, he's introducing the concept of the bridegroom and the husband of the church right there.

You find it in many other places. Now, what is the significance of this metaphor of the church? The church is the bride. Christ is the husband, the bridegroom.

What is the, what is there, what is the distinctive about the concept of Jesus Christ as the husband or the bridegroom? Well, a bridegroom's love or a husband's love is first of all, a love that has made its choice, made its choice and committed itself. Now, it may, it may be that some of you this morning think you're in love with someone else, but you haven't committed yourselves. Let me shake some of you up.

It may be the time has come for you to commit yourself. Don't lead a girl up the garden path or the other way around for that matter, but that's not my business this morning. Our Lord Jesus Christ has committed himself to his bride.

He's not been flirting with her. Oh, he's not been making vague promises or professions, but he's committed himself. He's chosen her.

He's singled her out. You know what you do when you become married, you look around the whole world and you look at the people of the opposite sex and you bring them down perhaps to a short list of three. Oh, I shouldn't say that, should I? What do you do? But ultimately you choose one.

Now, I didn't do that. So please don't bring that against me. But the point I'm getting to is this, you see, ultimately, ultimately you exclude everybody else, unless you live in a polygamous society.

You exclude everybody else and you say, this is the one, and you become that person's husband. Now, the glorious thing about this image is this, it tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ has committed himself in love. He's not made vague statements about his care for us or his love for us, but he's drawn us to himself and he's committed himself to us.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest love story ever told. It speaks of an undying love for the most unworthy objects, a love that is so often ridiculed even as it is coldly rejected and refused. No lover ever came so far or stooped so low or offered such a sacrifice to win his bride, but he did.

He did it. And he's committed himself. Let me add to that, he's not simply committed himself, he's covenanted with his bride.

Now, there can be a commitment which is short of a covenant, but Jesus Christ has covenanted with his bride. That is, he has committed himself as far as it is possible for him to go. He has put his character on the line.

He has put his good name on the line. And he says, look, I will on no condition cast you off if you come to me. I will love you to the very uttermost.

And he's given us two wedding rings or an engagement ring and a wedding ring. I don't care how you think of it. He's given us two symbols.

He's given us two rights which prove this. And that's what the two sacraments are meant to be. They are signs and seals of the covenant intention of our blessed Lord.

Whether you are immersed in the waters of baptism or whether the water is poured upon you, don't lose the significance of either. It means this. Jesus is saying, as sure as I have cleansed you from my sin of which this water is a symbol, your sins will never be allowed to come between you and me again, only on a temporary basis, never eternally to separate us.

I'll not allow it. I've loved you with an everlasting love. And when once I set my love upon you, I'll not give you up.

When we come to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and let me remind you, good people, two weeks from today, we should be meeting at his table. What's the meaning of it? Well, there are many aspects of it, but one is this. It's just as if the husband were to take the bride's hand in his again and take the wedding ring off for a moment and put it back again and say, I'm choosing you again.

And I want you to be sure and sure as sure can be that I'm choosing you again to keep you my own. I don't care what your sins have been. I love you still.

In fact, you see, this is a conquering love. This, the apostle John puts it like this. We love because he first loved us.

What do you mean, John? Well, what he means is this. We are only capable of loving God with Christian love and of loving one another with Christian love because the love of God has overcome us and it has transformed us and it has found a way into our hearts to make us new creatures. And we are able to love just because he loved us.

Now look at the implications of lordship here. I've gone very quickly over that. You must, you must kindly spell it out and read it up in your own private time.

The implications of lordship in that metaphor, all their multitude in us. Let me concentrate on perhaps two or three. First of all, once again, we see in this image of the church, the primacy of Christ's love, which brought the church into being.

In the previous metaphor, we said we referred to that little term at the heart of ecclesia, *clasis*, calling, who calls the head of the church. He calls men and women to be his, his own. Now you see, it's the same truth, but in a different guise, in a different garb.

What is this? He loved me. He drew me and I followed on. He set his love upon us.

The fact is we were all unlovely in our natural state. Not only were we unlovely, but we were hateful to God. We were disobedient.

We despised his law. We desecrated his every commandment from the first to the last. We turned his cosmos upside down by putting ourselves, the creature in the center and putting the creator on the circumference or putting him into limbo.

We turn everything upside down. So the apostle Paul doesn't hesitate to say that we were hostile to God and we were enemies of God, but he loved us. Why are we here? How do you explain the fact that you're in Christ this morning, believer? I'll tell you there's only one explanation.

He loved you despite your sin. Now I'm going to read you a passage this morning, which you may never have heard read from a pulpit before. No passage to my mind expresses that love for the unlovely better than one in Ezekiel.

The language is picturesque, but it is terribly daring and it is expressive of the glorious reality that lay first of all behind God's love for ancient Israel and behind the love of the same God in Christ for the Israel, the church. Now listen to this. Lest you think it's not in the Bible, you look it up afterwards, Ezekiel 16, 2 to 14.

Listen to this, but please listen carefully. Don't miss anything. Son of man, says God to Ezekiel, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices and say, this is what the sovereign Lord says to Jerusalem.

Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites. Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. On the day that you were born, your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloth.

No one looked on you with pity or had compassion upon you enough to do you any of these things. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field for on the day you were born, you were despised. Then says the Lord God, then says God, I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood.

And as you lay there in your blood, I said to you, live. I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels.

Your breasts were formed and your hair grew and you were naked and bare and you were lovely. Later, I passed by and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the sovereign Lord, and you became mine.

I bathed you with water and I washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals under your feet. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments.

I adorned you with jewelry. I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. So you were adorned with gold and silver.

Your clothes were a fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen.

And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the sovereign Lord. Men and women, I ask you, did you ever come across such a representation of absolute love as that? When you and I were in our blood, God in infinite compassion loved us. Now, the next thing is the continuity of that infinite love keeps the church in being.

And here again, we see the amazing lordly love of our Savior. Were it not for our Lord's undying and abiding love, we would have been cast aside a long, long time ago. You see, we make promises, but we break them.

Every one of us. We begin to do something and we pack it up. Every one of us.

We rebel and we break the commandments of saints that we broke as sinners. Someone expressed this truth to me recently in terms of a most painful confession that emerged from a startling realization. Distressed with his own lack of growth as a Christian, this believer of 25 years said to me that it had just hit him between the eyes.

It is as if the Lord had spoken to him so clearly. He said for 25 years, you've been coming back to me. You've been confessing the same sins, almost in identically the same words for 25 years, you've done that.

And it had just come home to roost. It's true. Why hasn't the Lord given me up? Am I presuming upon the grace of God? How would you answer a man like that? I turned him to a passage, some words from which we know very well, but we don't know the context in the book of lamentations in chapter three.

I asked him to read these words because of the Lord's great love. We are not consumed for his compassions never fail that we know. But we scarcely give a thought to what he said before it.

Why are his compassions new every morning when we rebel against him and are unprofitable servants of theirs? Why? It's because of his unchanging love. He's determined to love his people through to the end.

Now, of course, it is the prophet Hosea who, out of his personal experience, proclaims the sovereignty and mastery of divine love most daringly in the scriptures.

You people who don't read your old testament, you miss so much. I would encourage you get back to your old testaments. Listen to this story.

When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, go take to yourself an adulterous wife. That's a command for you. That's contrary to the normal practices of God.

But he had a special message to declare to the nation and the special times and the special condition of the nation demanded something right out of the ordinary. Go and take yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness. Because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.

So he married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. And she conceived and she bore him a son. Now, you go on from there and what you find in the next chapter, chapter two, is a hideous story of how Gomer, Hosea's wife, played the harlot.

How she went after one man and another and gave her body and gave her mind, gave her soul away and was untrue to her husband. Finally, she became a prostitute and left her home and left her husband. And then we begin to read in chapter three, listen to these amazing words.

The Lord said to me, Hosea is speaking, go show your love to your wife again. Though she is loved by another and is an adulteress, love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes. So says Hosea, I bought her for 15 shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethic of barley.

You see, she had sold herself. She'd become a slave. She'd become a prostitute.

And Hosea buys her out of her prostitution. And then he turns to her and he says, then I told her, you are to live with me many days. You must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man.

I will live with you and you will live with me. Did you ever read such a, of such love? Can you conceive of such undying grace? The relationship continued for one solitary reason. God gave Hosea a love that was more than a match to Gomer's hideous adultery.

And that was meant to be a mirror of God's own love, outmatching the very vilest sin in his people. This is Lordly love. This is sovereign love.

He refuses to give up. He loves to the end. George Matheson's theology was right.

Oh, love that wilt not let me go. That's why you and I are here this morning. God hasn't packed us up.

He hasn't thrown us on the scrap heap. He should have done so a thousand times. I speak for myself, but he hasn't done so.

Why hasn't he done so? Because his love is an everlasting love, a covenanted love, a given love, a committed love. Oh, love that wilt not let me go. I rest my weary soul in thee.

And then he elicits the response. I give thee back the life I owe. It's a love that wins.

And you follow the stanzas through. Oh, light that followest all my way. I yield my flickering torch to thee.

It's a love that wins through. And in the third stanza, oh joy that seekest me through pain. I cannot close my heart to thee.

And finally, oh cross that liftest up my head. I dare not ask to fly from thee. It's a love that wins, you see.

It abides. And the last thing I have to say, by no means the least important. And it is something which corrects what you may have misrep... I may have misrepresented if I left things where they are.

It corrects what could have been a false impression made. The fidelity of our Lord's love determines the outcome of his dealings with his bride. When we say that God's love continues through thick and thin, through sin and rebellion, we do not mean for one single moment that God does not hate our sin.

The fact that he continues to love us does not mean to say that he minimizes our sins and our rebellion. He hates our sin. And he will sometimes chastise us on account of that sin, but he will love his people still.

The love that first chose us when we were in a state of degradation and then continues undaunted by any sin in our lives is a love that is ultimately determined to change us. It's a holy love. I can only but read to you this morning these great words of Paul from Ephesians 5 to bring out this truth.

Husbands, he says, love your wives just as Christ loved the church. Well, how did Christ love the church? Now notice. And gave himself up to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

And here is the ultimate, to present her to himself as a radiant church or a glorious church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. Have you got the picture? Here is a covenant in love. Here is a continuing love.

Here is a conquering love in the sense that he doesn't give up the object he had in mind when he first made the church his own. What is it? To make the church like himself, to make the church a glorious church. The picture here is really tremendous.

First of all, he, he, Paul tells us the Lord is determined to take away even the outward evidences of blemish, of blemish. When at last Jesus will present the church to himself, there will be no spot or wrinkle upon her. You take that in.

We're all spotted this morning, whether we realize it or not, we've been in the world and we become spotted every one of us. Every one of us. And if there's anybody who thinks he's not spotted, he or she is especially spotted by blindness, if nothing else, and insensitivity.

If any man says I have no sin, he deceives himself, says John. But Jesus says that when at last he will present his church to himself, there will be no spot, there will be no wrinkle. Wrinkles come with old age, don't they? And sometimes due to sickness.

The church this morning looks very much like an old, old, old, weary, weary, weary person. Can hardly walk, can hardly talk, can hardly sing. There's very little breath left.

Can hardly go very far for the Lord. Can hardly move. We're just like a decrepit old person that can't walk about.

But listen, my friend, when our Lord presents the church to himself, having loved her from her sins and through her sins, she will at last be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. He cleanses us by the washing of the water and the word. And not only will she be without spot or wrinkle externally, she will be holy.

She will be holy and she will be radiant without blame. Perfected in love. I couldn't other than take a book down from the shelf the early part of the week that I had read earlier on from Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones on this passage.

And I was reminded of a very, very daring reference he makes here to this image. And he speaks from a medical point of view of the significance of wrinkles and various things and where they come from. And then he goes on to say something like this.

The church in the world has many wrinkles upon her. She gets to look old and aged. But thank God, Paul says, when the great day comes in which Christ will present the church to himself in all her glory, not only will there not be a single wrinkle, there will not be one left.

Everything will be smoothed out. Her skin will be perfect, whole and rounded. It is impossible to describe the perfection, he says.

The church will have renewed her youth. Dare I put it like this? The beauty specialist, capital B, capital S people, the beauty specialist will have put his final touch upon his bride. The massaging will have been so perfect that there will not be a single wrinkle left.

She will look young in the bloom of youth, with color in her cheeks, with her skin perfect, without any spots or wrinkles. And she will remain like that forever and ever. The body of her humiliation will be gone and over.

She will be clad in her new body, and the beautician will have finished his work. And then he adds, but not only will that be true of her externally, she will be the same internally. Psalm 45, in a most remarkable manner, is a perfect prophetic description of all this.

The king's daughter is all glorious within. The psalmist is not content to say that her clothing is of wrought gold and that she shall be brought into the king in arraignment of needlework. He emphasizes that she shall be all glorious within.

What have we got here? My friends, we have a sovereign love here. Can you see the lordship of Christ choosing his bride, continuing, daring to love her through her sin, chastising her, of course, from time to time, taking her into the wilderness from time to time to chastise her, but loving her still, even when he chastises her. Whom he loves, he chastens, but never giving up the original goal and intention of the lover.

What is that? To wash her and to cleanse her and to purify her and to transform her. And at last, he'll get what he was after. Oh, the sovereign lord of the church needs to be seen today.

Some of us have a very flabby concept of Jesus Christ, gentle Jesus, meek and mild, and we try to nurse him like a little child. My friend, look up, will you? He's lord, and he's lord of the church, and you have to bow under his lordship, and I have to. And the moment of challenge may very well be to some of us a moment of real heart-searching, when we shall see that we've never really done other than play with holy

thing.

I leave it with you. I ask you with me to pray over the significance of this for us as a congregation, for us as individuals, for the young that are growing among us, for our missionaries serving abroad, for all of us on the staff of everybody that is involved here, and for the saints of God in this great city and in this great land, that once again we may see that Jesus Christ is not a little plaything. He's lord, and we have to come to terms with it.

When he sets his love upon something and sets his heart upon something and decides to build the church as a building or to love his bride into being and to perfection, we must say with Toplady, the work which is goodness began, the arm of his strength will complete. His promises, yea and amen, never was forfeited yet. Things future nor things that are now, not all things below or above can make him his purpose forego nor sever my heart from his.

Where does this find us today? Are there not among us in this morning congregation in Knox, are there not among us those who need honestly and sincerely to bow the neck and bend the knee and acknowledge him and take a stand alongside of him in a world that still hates him and rejects him? Will you take that stand? I'm not going to ask you to walk to the front. You can do that if you want to, if it helps you, but I'm going to ask you with all the sincerity of my soul. If the spirit of God is speaking to you in that way this morning, make your peace with him, crown him Lord of all.

So let it be to his glory forever. Amen. We thank you for your word and your spirit for what you have made known to us about yourself and especially about the quality and the continuity of your love as it is revealed in your son, our savior Jesus Christ.

Grant us this morning our father that we may be drawn into the world of it. Grant that we may know what it is to be at the very eye of it all and thus bathing ourselves in that eternal love that first chose us and then died for us and then rose for us and then sent the Holy Spirit to bring us back to glory and then gave us the word to guide us on our way and assures us that one day though we go down to the grave, you will come back to receive us to yourself. We shall lose nothing through death.

Oh Lord, grant that we may find that we are able to rest and to nestle with hope in love so great and grace so free in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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