

Communion a time to remember

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[0:00] we turn to the 25th Psalm, which was read in our presence. Our Lord's command is, do this in remembrance of me.

Communion is a time for us to remember. Remember. Remembering, of course, is much more than it means in our world, where it is simply mental recollection.

In the Bible, to remember involves acting. And when we remember our Saviour, we don't just recollect Him.

We give thanks for Him. We seek Him. We trust in Him. We embrace Him in faith. All this is involved in our remembering.

And that helps us to understand what the Scripture means when it calls upon God Himself to remember.

[1:17] For when God remembers, it is more than our remembering. It involves His acting, His mercy.

God, we are told, remembered Rachel and opened her womb. The psalmist asks, what is man that he remembered is by thee?

And then he amplifies it. Or what the Son of Man that thou so kind to him shouldst be? For God to remember us is to be kind to us.

The dying thief prayed, remember me, Lord, when you come into your kingdom. Save me. Save me. Deliver me. Give me a share in that place.

This morning, from Psalm 25, verse 6, we want to think of God remembering. Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

[2:28] It's a familiar psalm to all of us. A very beautifully and skillfully written psalm.

It's what the scholars call an acrostic psalm. Each verse in the original begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet from the beginning to the end.

So David has written it very carefully and skillfully. But behind the art is the fact that it was written at some very low ebb in his life.

He is down, discouraged, and frightened. In verse 2 he says, let not my enemies exult over me.

There are those who hate and despise him and would wish to triumph over him. He confesses in verse 16, I am lonely and afflicted.

[3:34] He feels terribly alone. He speaks in verse 17 of the troubles of my heart. They are enlarged, he said.

Deep internal distress. In verse 19 he speaks of the violent hatred which his enemies hold towards him.

It is never pleasant to be hated. And David is hated by many. And he prays in verse 20, let me not be put to shame.

So here is a man facing very severe external pressures. Coming on him from without, pressing upon him, weighing him down, threatening to break him.

But to make the situation worse, these external pressures are allied with pressures inside him. He has been praying for guidance.

[4:34] Make me to know your ways. Teach me. Lead me. But he himself hasn't been obedient. So in verse 11 he has to ask, pardon my guilt.

For it is great. And in verse 18, forgive all my sins. So here is a man in a most unenviable position. Pressures from without. Guilt and anguish of heart from within. Either of these on its own is heavy enough.

Together they are a burden indeed. And who among us cannot identify with David. Amid the stresses and strains of life. And an inner wretchedness that makes us cry out to God for our failures and our shortcomings. And David does what we must do.

[5:37] He throws himself on God with this prayer. Remember your mercy, O Lord. And your steadfast love. For they have been from of old.

I want to look at these words under four headings. And firstly, the immediate problem. The immediate problem. Your mercy.

And your steadfast love. But is God merciful? Do we know him to be loving?

Well, of course, would most people say. Both inside and outside the church. If there is a God at all. He's seen as being a kind, genial, ever smiling being.

Gazing down with untroubled affection upon his world. But how many people are really deeply, personally persuaded in the depths of their being.

[6:48] That God is truly merciful and steadfastly loving. We look at the world around us.

If God is loving and all powerful. Why is this world as it is, people say? Why the ugliness and the tragedy?

Does it reflect a loving God? We look at the personal tragedies. The things that happen in people's lives.

Which seem appallingly cruel. And meaningless. I think of a Christian farmer. In our province. His little girl had been away staying with her granny. And she'd come home unexpectedly and she ran out to meet her daddy. And he didn't see her. And he drove the back wheel of his tractor.

[7:53] Over his daughter. Killed her. Now, what does that say to us? About a loving God.

Our own feelings of unworthiness. How many times I and any minister have sat down with some of the Lord's choicest people.

And they have no question about the love and the mercy of God. And they have no difficulty in believing that he is a God of love. And that he loves their friends and their family and their fellow worshippers.

But when it comes to themselves. Somehow. They cannot accept. That he loves me.

They feel so unworthy. Their failures are so keen. And it is difficult for them. To lay hold. Of the love of God.

[8:54] Christians are meant to be like our father. And yet all too often the lives of Christians do not exhibit love. And not all Christians are kind.

And they do not make it easier for us. To believe in the love of their heavenly father. And all the time the devil is whispering into our ears and in our hearts.

Casting suspicion on God. God knows that in the day you eat thereof. You will become like God's. Right from the beginning.

That was his strategy. God doesn't love you. God doesn't care for you. He is the slanderer. The liar. So that there can be practically.

Not theoretically. But practically. A widespread doubt. Of the love of God. Even among some of his professing people. Even among some of the best of his people.

[9:58] We can be afraid of him. In the wrong sense. We can suspect him. As a people.

Both Scots and Irish. We are natively reluctant. To believe good news. Say to an Ulster farmer. That it's a beautiful day.

And he will look at the sky suspiciously. And say well. The weather may change before too long. Tell him that he has a good crop. And he'll say I've seen worse. We're not people who like to be extravagant about good things.

We believe in walking. quietly and humbly. And that can be a weakness. So that we're not persuaded. Deeply.

Intimately persuaded. Of the mercy. And love. Of God. The immediate problem. But let's come secondly.

[10:59] To the irrefutable proof. The irrefutable proof. Because God has told us. That he is. A loving God.

And that he does. Love his people. And he has told us. Over and over again. And he tells us. Here. And these two Hebrew words. Which are used.

Over and over again. In the Old Testament. And especially. In the Psalms. Mercy. And steadfast love. Mercy.

Is a glorious word. It means pity. Compassion. Kindness. It's the emotion felt.

By a father or mother. As they go into the child's bedroom. Or in my case now. The grandchildren's bedroom. And look down. At your sleeping child.

[11:56] And you notice the curve of her cheek. And her parted lips. And her little relaxed hands. And there's a feeling. Deep in your heart. Of intense.

Tenderness. And pity. And love. You almost want to weep. And yet it's sweet. Haven't you felt that way?

You want to protect them. You want to care for them. You want to keep the hurts. Away from them. And you want the best for them. Tender mercy. And when God describes. How he feels to his people. That's the word he uses.

That's how I feel he says. Towards you. Tender mercy. And then it's buttressed. By steadfast love. Steady.

[12:54] Faithful. Gracious. Unfailing. Loyal. Covenant. Affection. This is our God. A God of tender mercy.

And of steadfast love. Towards us. It's the Old Testament counterpart. Of God. Is. Love. Love. And my friends. That is the nearest.

We get to a definition of God. In the Bible. God is spirit. And God is love. And it's saying more. Much more. Than that God is loving.

It's telling us that love. Is of the essence. Of what it means. To be God. It is the necessity. Of his very nature.

This is the importance. Of the Trinity. From all eternity. Love has been experienced. And practiced. And felt.

[13:52] Between Father. Son. And spirit. They have loved one another. The three persons. And rejoiced. In each other's love. Love. And we should never.

For a moment. Think of God. As anything. Towards his people. But complete. Total. Love. And it's more than that. It's abundant love.

It's overflowing love. These nouns. In the original. Are in the plural. Our metrical version. Captures it. Thy tender mercies.

Lord. I pray thee to remember. And loving kindnesses. Many of these things. One commentator calls them. Acts of loving kindness.

Acts of loving kindness. Many multiplied. Striking examples. Love demonstrated. In the old testament.

[14:52] Again and again. We saw. We see God. Reaching down. In pity and mercy. To love his people. And in the life. And miracles of our Lord.

We see his kindness. And his mercy. As he touches the leper. And brings joy to the widow. And heals the blind. And takes the children. In his arms. And in our own experience.

Every one of us. Who is the Lord's people. Have countless examples. Of the tender mercies. And the loving kindnesses. Of God. And more than that.

Says the psalmist. This is eternal love. Eternal love. Remember your mercy. Oh Lord. And your steadfast love.

For they are. From of old. Love is not a recent development. In God's character. Love is an intrinsic.

[15:53] Unalterable. Part of us being. Right back in the covenant of redemption. When he set. His love. Out of his mere good pleasure. Upon a people. Before the world was.

He loved us. He held us in his heart. He felt with tender compassion. And steadfast loyalty. Towards us. The psalmist says in Psalm 103.

That the steadfast love of the Lord. Is from everlasting. To everlasting. Upon those who fear him. God says through Jeremiah.

I have loved you. With an everlasting love. Gerhardus Voss comments on those words. Think about this.

And you'll think for a long time. Before you exhaust them. The best proof. That he will never cease to love us. Lies.

[16:56] In that he never began. He never began. I have loved you.

With an everlasting love. Such knowledge is too strange for me. Too high to understand. God has told us.

God has shown us. And above all. At Calvary. For God so loved the world. That he gave his only begotten son.

And in this. The love of God has been made manifest. And in this. That God sent his only son. Into the world.

So that we might live through him. And God commands. His love towards us. In this. That while we were sinners. Christ died for us.

[17:54] So the cross you see. Sets God's love. Beyond all challenge. And all question. The cross. Is the great argument.

For his love. Which no one can gainsay. Or contradict. We can paraphrase. His words to Abraham. And say. Lord now. I know that you love me.

For you have not withheld. From me. Your son. Your only son. We come to God. And we say. Show me.

That you love me. He points us to Calvary. And he says. What more. Could I possibly do. What further evidence.

Do we need. Today. Of the love of God. Than the table. And the bread. And the wine.

[18:53] And the bread. And the bread. And the bread. Some of you here. Today. Have still not. Trusted in Christ.

As your savior. I want you to understand. That it is the mercy. And love. Of God. That you are rejecting.

And turning your back on. And you are turning this. This verse round. Friend. You are saying. Do not remember your mercy. As far as I am concerned.

Oh God. Is that what you want to say? Is that really what you want to say?

Surely you won't. Surely you won't turn your back. On God's kindness.

[19:56] And walk away from it. But this brings us. Thirdly. To the inward persuasion. For those of us.

Who are the Lord's people. Are you convinced of this? Are you sure of it? You need to be. Towards you.

God is mercy. And steadfast love. I've been a minister now. For. Thirty seven years.

Three hundred and sixty three days. As ordained on the third of October. Nineteen sixty eight. And I'm sure.

That one of the greatest. Most common. Pastoral problems. Which I've observed. Throughout all my ministry. Is the need. For God's people.

[20:55] To grasp. His love. And to be sure. Of his love. The immense. Infinite. Kindness. Of their heavenly father.

This is the reason. Why so many lack assurance. This is the reason. For chronic. Spiritual problems. This is the reason.

Why we're down. In the shallows. And the depths. So often. This is the reason. For much of our timidity. In Christian service. This is the reason. Why some Christians.

Find it so hard. To love others. They don't. Puritans. As grim. Austere men. Quite wrong. Listen to John Owen. Speaking to God's people.

Be fully. Assured. In your hearts. That the father loves you. Have no fears. Or doubts. About his love.

[21:51] For you. Let this. Be the first. Thought. That we have. Of the father. That he is. Full of love.

Eternal love. Towards us. Let this. Be the first thought. He's full of eternal love. Towards us.

Such pity. As a father hath. Unto his children dear. Like pity. Shows the Lord. To such as worship him in fear.

Let this be our persuasion. Today. God loves me. In Christ. God loves me.

God loves me. And he's merciful. Kind. And steadfast. Alexander White. Tells us that when he was a very young minister in Edinburgh.

[22:48] He paid a pastoral visit on a. An eminent. Crusty. Difficult. Businessman. And White. And White was from very humble circumstances. And he was completely intimidated by this man.

And the man said to him. Gruffly. Have you a word for an old sinner? And young Alexander White. Couldn't think of what to say. And eventually stuttered out.

Micah 7.18. He delighteth. In mercy. The man came to him afterwards. And said those.

Were words. From heaven. Balm to his soul. My dear friends. God. Delights. In mercy.

He delights. He doesn't extend it. Grudgingly. Or reluctantly. It glorifies him.

[23:55] It pleases him. To be merciful to us. And that brings us.

Fourthly and lastly. To the focus of the text. The irresistible prayer.

The irresistible prayer. Remember. Remember your mercy. Oh Lord. And your steadfast love.

David. With childlike trust.

In the face of all his troubles. Simply throws himself. Into his father's arms. He doesn't bring. Before God.

His own character. His own holiness. His own achievements. His own works. How could he do that?

He prays. On the basis. Of who.

God. Is. Of who. God is. Augustine comments. Remember me Lord.

[24:50] Not according to your anger. Of which I am worthy. But according to your mercy. Of which you are worthy.

Isn't that good? God. In other words. He comes to God. And he says. Lord. Remember. Who you are. Be to me.

Who you are. Act. In a way. Which reflects. Your being. Be consistent. With yourself.

Can you see the force of this. For us today. Here's this man. And his guilt. And his fears. And his troubles. And he's coming to God. And he says.

Lord. I'm not asking you. To make an exception. For me. I'm not asking you. To change your way. Of working. I'm not asking you.

[25:47] To do something. Which you're reluctant. To do. I'm not asking you. To do something. Which is strange. To you. I'm not asking you. To bend the rules. I'm not asking you.

To violate your own. Sensibilities. I'm asking you. To do. What you'd like to do. I'm asking you. To be yourself. Towards me. Remember your mercy.

Your steadfast love. And we can pray. These words. Even more meaningfully. Than David. For God's mercy.

Now has a name. And a face. And God's steadfast love. Has been embodied. In human flesh. We simply come to him.

And we say. Lord. Remember Jesus Christ. That's all. My dear friends.

[26:50] If ever. Any prayer. Is certain. Of an answer. This is. He cannot.

Deny himself. He cannot. Deny his son. The brightness. The brightness. Of his glory. The express image.

Of his person. And the table. Is spread. Before us. And the table. Is to remind us. To remind us. Of Christ. We look at the elements.

And we say to ourselves. This is who God is. This is what God is like. Towards all those. Who have received his love. And Jesus. But. It is also.

To remind God. To remind God. Of Christ. This morning. We feel. Guilty.

[27:49] And vulnerable. And weak. And burdened. But all we have to do. Is to point our God. To the table.

Say. Father. Remember Christ. See. God our shield.

Look on the face. Of thine anointed. Dear. And if you can ask him that. Then we're saved.

And we're secure. And we're welcome. Remember your mercy. Oh Lord. And your steadfast love.

And he never can. And he never will. Refuse that prayer. Or to put it in New Testament terms. In Jesus name. And for his sake.

[28:50] Amen. Let us pray. This is our plea.

Most merciful God. He only. Our salvation is. And our strong rock is he. He only. Is our sure defense. We have nothing else to say to you God. But to confess. Our total unworthiness.

We come. We come. We come. Pleading Christ. Pleading Christ. Pleading Christ. As our Savior. And we are sure. That in him. You will receive us. To your table.

[30:00] And to your blessing. My loving kindnesses. Oh Lord. We pray thee to remember. Thy tender mercies.

And loving kindnesses. For they have been of old forever. In Jesus name. Amen.