



Preparation for Worship: King of Love

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqsChaiBkQ4>

The king of love my Shepherd is
Whose goodness faileth never
I nothing lack if I am his
And He is mine forever
And He is mine forever

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul He leadeth
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth

Never-failing Ruler of my heart
Everlasting Lover of my soul
On the mountain high or in the valley low
The King of love my Shepherd is
The King of love my Shepherd is

Lost and foolish off I strayed
But yet in love He sought me
And on His shoulder gently laid
And home rejoicing brought me

In death's dark veil, I fear no ill

With Thee, dear Lord, beside me
Thy rod and staff my comfort still
Thy cross before to guide me

Never-failing Ruler of my heart
Everlasting Lover of my soul
On the mountain high or in the valley low
The King of love my Shepherd is
The King of love my Shepherd is

Oh-oh-oh, hallelujah, hallelujah
Oh-oh-oh, hallelujah, hallelujah

Never failing, Ruler of my heart
Everlasting Lover of my soul
On the mountain high or in the valley low
The King of love my Shepherd is

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never
Good Shepherd, may I sing Your praise
Within Your house forever
Within Your house forever

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Hymn: 10,000 Reasons Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDQn9cWC4Yc&t=2s>

Bless the Lord oh my soul Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

The sun comes up
It's a new day dawning
It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass
And whatever lies before me
Let me be singing
When the evening comes

Bless the Lord oh my soul ...

You're rich in love
And You're slow to anger
Your name is great

And Your heart is kind
For all Your goodness
I will keep on singing
Ten thousand reasons
For my heart to find

Bless the Lord oh my soul ...

And on that day
When my strength is failing
The end draws near
And my time has come
Still my soul will
Sing Your praise unending
Ten thousand years
And then forevermore

Bless the Lord oh my soul ...

Jonas Myrin / Matt Redman 10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord) lyrics © Capitol CMG Publishing, O/B/O DistroKid

Reading: John 17 v. 20-26

Prayer

Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, We thank you for the unity we see in you and we pray that we too may know that same unity both with each other and with you. May we know that glory given from Father to Son and given from Jesus, the Son, to us. May we know that love you have for us, that same deep and rich love that has been there since before the creation of the world. May we know what it is to be truly rooted in you. May we know what it is to be with Jesus every step of the way – both in this life and through all eternity. And may our belief and knowledge and rootedness be a sign for the world that others might see and believe and know as well.

Lord, there is so much depth in these verses and so much depth in the relationship we have with you, yet much of the time we are shallow in our Christian lives. We are afraid to go deeper or live our lives as if we weren't connected to you. When we do that, we so easily fall into sin that hurts us and others and you. Forgive us, we pray, and draw us deeper in to you that we might have the strength to resist temptations and to learn and to grow. **Amen.**

Hymn: StF 351 In Christ Alone

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljlsOQ269I4>

In Christ alone, my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live, I live

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Keith Getty / Stuart Townend © Thankyou Music Ltd.

Message:

A few years ago I came across a song by a Christian band called I Am They. It was their reworking of the old hymn 'The King of Love by Shepherd Is' and, if you've used the link given at the beginning of this week's printed service, then you've already listened to it. That was from their first recorded CD and they went on to record another two before disbanding in 2022. You might wonder at the name 'I Am They'. Where does it come from? Here's the official explanation:

The name is inspired by John 17 - created with the intent to adopt on a personal and individual level. As Jesus prays in this chapter, he consistently refers to his disciples as "they". It is important to each band member to be the "they" that Jesus referred to.

And here's part of what Jesus prayed in those verses from John 17:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one

Many of us will know what it's like to support a football team and go regularly to watch matches. There we are bound together with thousands of other supporters. We probably don't know more than maybe a handful of them. If we got to know them we would find many with whom we had little else in common and some that we intensely disliked. Yet, in our love for the team, we are united with them – we are one.

People often refer back to Jesus' prayer at ecumenical gatherings when the attention is on church unity - "I pray, Father, that they may be one ..." – but what sort of unity is Jesus talking about? You might see it like the football. In our following of Jesus, we have something that unites us and sets aside any differences there are between us. Just as I can be very different to my neighbour at football, so Anglicans, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists etc., can have very different ways of looking at things yet still recognise that our following Jesus transcends all of that.

But the more I read those verses, the more I think that Jesus is pointing towards something subtly different from that. He's not praying that we may be connected because of Jesus. He's praying that we will be connected because we are in Jesus and he in us.

"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us ..."

Three steps

- 1) I pray for them, those future disciples, us, that they may be one.
- 2) Jesus says to his Father. You and I are one and I pray that they may be one just like that.
- 3) Jesus says, to take away any shadow of doubt, may they be in us.

Our unity, our connection, comes from being one with Jesus and, thus, one with God.

I have an I am They T Shirt with three intersecting rings that tries to illustrate that prayer. I've been trying to think of an appropriate illustration myself, like the football crowd, but I can't. Only the one that Jesus gave of the vine and its branches. I am the vine. You are the branches. Remain in me.

I don't, though, want us to spend too much time today trying to get our heads round what is after all a mystery. Rather, I want to ask a further question. If we are one in Jesus, what should that look like to the world because Jesus prayed "May they also be in us so that the world may believe you have sent me". How might our being united in Jesus look to the world?

In order to begin to answer that let's look at what Jesus said next. *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one."* Just in case you were wondering, Jesus is still talking about us. We are the ones to whom he has given his glory. But what does that mean? I guess that question could be answered in many different ways but I want to answer it by going back to the beginning of John's Gospel because there John said:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So, for John, the visible glory of Jesus, as he lived alongside them, is linked to his being full of grace and truth. What about us and the people we are alongside? Do they see that same grace and truth lived out through us?

Truth and Grace – two divine attributes that are so vitally needed in our world today. Truth is under so much fire in the political world with people either creating fake news or, whenever anything unfavourable comes out, claiming it is fake news. It is so hard to discern who is right and who is wrong. As the rest of the Gospel story played out, Jesus appeared before Pilate who famously asked the question 'What is Truth?' That was in response to Jesus saying this:

"The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

For Jesus, ultimate truth does not lie in words or opinions but in God. That is part of the glory he came to reveal. We find our discernment and direction – our truth - in God. That's why John also records Jesus as saying that if we follow his teachings, it will lead us to the truth and that truth will set us free.

Finally there is grace which, put as simply as possible, means being given what we don't deserve. We see that played out as Jesus dies on the cross and God gives us our forgiveness. We see that as Jesus does not ignore Peter's three denials but brings him back into fellowship by three times asking him if he loves Jesus. You could say that Peter deserved to be treated as a non-disciple as that was what he had shouted out but grace gives you more than you deserve. And we see grace exhibited in a slightly different way earlier that same day when the disciples were fishing on the lake and catching nothing. Jesus told them where to put down their net and they caught 153 large fish, too much to lift back onto the boat. Jesus didn't have to do that but he did. God in Jesus gives us so much more than we might deserve or even expect.

When I was thinking of a hymn to match with this sermon, what came to mind was one written by Graham Kendrick – 'Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is in you, the hope of glory in your heart'. I looked it up but was a little unsure of phrases like 'Arise a mighty army' and 'Now is the time for us to march upon the land'. We have seen too much, in recent times, of the devastation that has resulted from the actions of military forces in Gaza, Ukraine, Myanmar, Syria and many other places. Is this the kind of imagery we want to attach ourselves to?

But then I felt God saying to me, what about if you see yourselves as a different kind of army. An army that is one in my son. An army that reflects my glory. An army that because you are in him and in me shows the world what truth looks like so that life and freedom can follow in its wake. An army that spreads grace everywhere it goes. An army that gives to the world rather than taking. An army that does not seek to destroy its enemies but seeks to bless them. Maybe that's the illustration I never managed to find earlier on and my prayer, added to that of Jesus, is that we might be one in him and so full of his grace and truth, that all of that becomes possible.

Hymn: SOF 480 Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is in you Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6HA9G_hxHg

Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is in you
The hope of glory In our hearts
He lives! He lives! His breath is in you
Arise a mighty army We arise

God is at work in us His purpose to perform
Building a kingdom Of power not of words
Where things impossible By faith shall be made possible
Let's give the glory To Him now.

Now is the time for us To march upon the land
Into our hands He will give the ground we claim
He rides in majesty To lead us into victory
The world shall see That Christ is Lord

Though we are weak, His grace Is everything we need
We're made of clay But this treasure is within
He turns our weaknesses Into His opportunities
So that the glory Goes to Him

Graham Kendrick Copyright © 1983 Thankyou Music

Intercessory Prayer : Loving and gracious God, as I pray today, I do so in the name of Jesus, the Lord of love, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, trusting that your steadfast love endures forever.

I pray for all situations of war and conflict, remembering especially today all those affected by the conflict in Ukraine, and all working to bring peace. For the people of Gaza and the West Bank. For those living in fear of escalating conflict across the Middle East and around the world. For the people of Yemen, and South Sudan.

Comfort those who are suffering and give strength to all who seek to offer love, peace and healing.

Today, I pray for all who lack the essentials of life; food, clothing, shelter, love, including the over 4,000 people sleeping rough in England, and the 200,000 people experiencing homelessness and living in unsuitable or temporary accommodation.

Come close to those in need and make me, and the society we live in generous to respond from whatever resources we have.

Loving and gracious God, I offer these prayers to you today in the name of Jesus, the Lord of love, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, trusting that your steadfast love endures forever. Thanks be to God, Amen.

(Prayer taken from The Vine at Home for 3rd August, compiled and produced by twelvebaskets)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: StF 620 Thou God of Truth and Love Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04K576Bke3s>

Thou God of truth and love, we seek thy perfect way,
ready thy choice to approve, Thy providence to obey:
enter into thy wise design, and sweetly lose our will in
thine.

till all thy utmost goodness prove,
and rise renewed in perfect love?

Why hast thou cast our lot in the same age and place?
And why together brought to see each other's face?
To join with loving sympathy, and mix our friendly souls
in thee?

Then let us ever bear the blessed end in view,
and join, with mutual care, to fight our passage through;
and kindly help each other on, till all receive the starry
crown.

Didst thou not make us one, that we might one remain,
together travel on, and share each other's pain;

O may thy Spirit seal our souls unto that day,
with all thy fulness fill, and then transport away!
Away to our eternal rest, away to our Redeemer's
breast!

Charles Wesley (1707-88)