



Hymn: Songs of Fellowship 2231 10000 Reasons (Bless the Lord, O my soul)

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDQn9cWC4Yc>

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul
Worship His holy name
Sing like never before, O 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, O my soul

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger

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

Prayer : *The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning ...*

There was one church in which I led worship where I would sometimes ask people, as a basis for our opening prayers, to think of something for which they were grateful; something to thank God for. One particular lady always came out with the same answer. She wanted to thank God that she had woken up that morning!

Maybe that's not a bad starting place for us today. Let's thank God for the gift of this new day and another day of life with whatever it will contain. Let's thank God that wherever the day may take us and whatever we may do, he is there with us – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Bring to God your joys, sorrows, hopes and stresses for what lies ahead. And let's look back as well as forward. Let's thank God for past blessings as we pause to reflect. Blessings that we see in the life of the world – creation, the gift of Jesus, the gift of forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit; God's mighty sustaining power through each new day – and let's also thank God for those blessings that are very personal to us in our own, individual lives.

Lord, God, We bring you our thanks and praise today. For all your goodness we will keep on singing. We may not come up with 10,000 but there are so many reasons for gratitude today. We do not deserve your love and faithfulness, nor could we ever earn it. Even now, we can list our failings in living the Christian life just as surely as we have listed the blessings. We acknowledge before you that we are fallible human beings reliant on your grace and on the power of your Holy Spirit. We are totally dependent on you and, therefore, may we know the assurance of your forgiveness and the redirecting guidance of your Spirit to set us back upon the paths that you would have us walk. **Amen.**

Reading: Luke 18 v. 18-30

A certain ruler asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother."' 'All these I have kept since I was a boy,' he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' Those who heard this asked, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.' Peter said to him, 'We have left all we had to follow you!' 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus said to them, 'no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.'

In looking at this passage, we so often focus on the first of Jesus' suggestions to this man who comes before him, that he sells his possessions and gives to the poor, that we simply take the second for granted. Come and follow me. We need the two together. We need to recognise and deal with those things in our lives that would pull us away from God but, in following Jesus, we are led into those things that draw us towards God and God's ways. That's what we're looking towards as we sing the hymn, 'Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart'.

Hymn: StF 477 Teach me to dance Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMeAyiz1niE>

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart
Teach me to move in the power of your Spirit
Teach me to walk in the light of your presence
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart
Teach me to love with your heart of compassion
Teach me to trust in the word of your promise
Teach me to hope in the day of your coming
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart

You wrote the rhythm of life
Created heaven and earth
In You is joy without measure
So, like a child in your sight
I dance to see your delight

For I was made for your pleasure
Pleasure

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart ...

Let all my movements express
A heart that loves to say 'yes'
A will that leaps to obey you
Let all my energy blaze
To see the joy in your face
Let my whole being praise you
Praise you

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart ...

Message

Let me share a story with you that I'm assured is a true one. A Catholic priest was out walking late at night when he was set upon by a robber who demanded cash. As he opened his coat to get out his wallet, the robber noticed his dog collar and suddenly changed his tune. 'I'm sorry Father. Forgive me. I would never steal from a priest.' Relieved, the priest took out a packet of cigarettes instead and graciously offered one of them to his would-be assailant. 'Thank you, Father, but no,' came the reply 'I've given them up for Lent'.

We smile at this story because there seems such a preposterous disconnect within it. It seems absurd to temporarily give up something trivial when there are far greater things wrong with how you are living your life but so it should be for us too. Lent traditionally has never been about giving up a minor bad habit that, ironically, we then take up again on the very day that Jesus rises from the dead! Rather, if we're going to use Lent for the purpose of spiritual discipline it should be about reflecting on the big picture of our lifestyle and changing those big things that, if ignored, will threaten our relationship with God.

With that in mind, let's dive in to our Gospel story.

A certain ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

The word 'ruler' might make us think of kings and princes but it most likely refers here to somebody who was a recognised leader at a local, civic level. Elsewhere it is used to describe a magistrate or an official within the religious hierarchy. Often this man is referred to in sermons not just as a ruler but as the 'rich, young ruler' and this comes from pooling the additional information that we get from Matthew and Mark's gospels. There is one other thing we can add. Their culture was very different to ours. There were no 'millionaire rich kids' who had made their fortunes from ingenious entrepreneurship. If you were young and rich it was almost certainly because you came from a respected and influential family.

How would you define eternal life? I guess a first response would be to focus on the word 'eternal' and say that it suggests a life that goes on forever. Did you know there's a jellyfish that, in theory at least, is immortal? As long as it stays away from anything that would eat it and from other dangers, then theoretically it could keep on regenerating itself forever.

That's not what we're talking about here. We're not talking about living forever because we avoid dying. We're talking about a life that goes on forever because it continues on the other side of death. And when the Bible speaks about eternal life it specifically sees it as being rooted in a relationship with God; a relationship that begins on this side of death and continues on the other. That's what this rich, young ruler is looking for.

'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

How would you answer him? If you know that you have that relationship with God that brings eternal life, what did you do to gain it?

Jesus asks about the keeping of the commandments - You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother.

The young man replies that, as far as he knows, he has kept all of them. He sees them much like credits, or boxes to be ticked, by which he will gain credit with God but he is wrong. I hope you know that we do not have to meet any minimum requirements to enter into that relationship. We did not have to work to earn it. We did not have to put ourselves in a position where we deserved it. I hope that's what you answered when I asked the question earlier.

Instead, God offers it freely to everyone regardless of their status or goodness. All we had to do was accept it and begin living the way that God wants us to live.

When we think about the commandments they're not, therefore, to be seen as a set of rules and that by keeping those rules we fulfil the entrance requirements for Heaven. They do still point us towards what we should and shouldn't do but they're not an entrance exam. How we should see them as Christians is markers or guideposts that help us to keep our relationship with God on track and which help us avoid those things that would act as negative pulls taking us in the wrong direction.

Let's return to those commandments. You'll notice that Jesus omits the first four of the ten commandments – the ones that deal with our relationship with God – choosing to start with those commandments that govern our relationships with other people. He lists numbers 5-9 of the ten. Did you notice which commandment he omitted? It's the one about not coveting what other people have. Why does he do this? Because he knows that this is exactly what is pulling the man in the wrong direction. His attitude towards his possessions and wealth is what's holding him back and so Jesus goes straight to the nub of the issue:

'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'

We can't say what was going on in the mind of that young man but we are told that he was very sad because he was very wealthy. The presumption, therefore, is that he enjoyed too much the security, comforts, attention and respect that wealth brought him. Note too that separating himself from that wealth might also require separating himself from his family. That's a tough choice but, sadly, one that, many Christians in our world also face.

Wealth, earthly comforts, civic authority, family connections. Please note that none of these are wrong in themselves. They become wrong when they exert that negative pull upon us that takes us away from God. That is why Jesus advised the rich, young ruler as he did and why he will do the same in our lives as and when it might be needed.

What about you? Wealth or public prestige may not be stumbling blocks for you but I pray that this Lent you may have time, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to reflect upon any things in your life that might have a negative pull upon your relationship with God. Ask Jesus to reveal things to you as he did for the man in our reading and I pray that, through the strength of the Spirit, you may be enabled to turn away from those things and may be strengthened in your walk with God.

Hymn: StF 545 Be thou my vision

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DORM8ttY1ws>

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my battle shield, sword for the fight;
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight;

Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower:
Raise Thou me heavenward, O power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my treasure Thou art.

High King of Heaven, my victory won,
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for the promise of eternal life that you hold out to us and for that relationship that we can have with you that begins here, on this side of death, and goes on forever. We thank you that you will never leave us or forsake us. Help us, we pray, to live life your way and give us the strength to resist any negative pulls that would draw us away from you.

As we pray for ourselves, that we might enjoy your life in all its fulness, so too we pray for the world and against all those things that deny people the kind of lives that you intend for them.

We pray against poverty and against the causes of poverty. Your intentions are for everyone to have what they need – neither in unnecessary wealth nor in want – and for the strong to help the weak.

May your will be done here on earth **as it is in Heaven.**

We pray against homelessness because everyone needs shelter and the security of somewhere to call home. We pray for those who have to leave their homes behind because of war or conflict or because of more personal reasons such as the breakdown of relationships or mental health issues.

May your will be done here on earth **as it is in Heaven.**

We pray for peace and all that works for peace. Your intention is for your children to live together in harmony but everywhere we look we see division. Bring your peace, we pray, for fractured relationships between individuals; within families; within communities and between peoples and nations.

May your will be done here on earth **as it is in Heaven.**

We pray that people may find purpose and fulfilment in their lives and against all that strips them of hope, dignity and humanity. Especially, we pray that people may come to know you and come into relationship with you because it is only through reconnecting with you that we can find true purpose and meaning for our lives.

May your will be done here on earth **as it is in Heaven.**

In the stillness, bring to God your prayers for yourself and those closest to you; for the communities in which you mix; and for the wider world. *Silence*

May your will be done here on earth **as it is in Heaven.** Amen.

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 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:
Till 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.

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.