

Exodus Chapter 23 v 20 - 33

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] I strich Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Good evening. Good evening. Lovely to welcome you this evening. We're a little bit less than we were this morning, but not much, because we've got a few hangers-on still left over from the September, the September Barber School, and some mums and dads as well, and visitors, I assume, as well.

So we do welcome you and trust that together we may be aware of the Lord's presence and nearness in our worship, and we may know Him speaking to us through His Word. When we come to worship our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to remind ourselves again and again who it is that we are drawing near to.

[2 : 24] In Revelation chapter 1, we have this description of the Lord Jesus Christ as He speaks and writes, as He speaks to the Apostle John.

Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, to Him who loves us and has cleansed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be kings and priests to serve His God and Father, to Him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

There's really no amount of superlatives, no amount of words to describe the wonder of our Lord Jesus, to tell of all His greatness and all His grace. But we know that even now, as we come to worship, we're joining with the hosts of heaven, the angels and the saints who have gone before us in praising His name.

So let's stand and sing 186 in our hymn books. "'Tis the church triumphant, singing, worthy the Lamb." The church is one, both in heaven and on earth, but they're divided into two companies. The church militant is us, in other words, we're the ones who are carrying on in the battle in the Christian life. And there's the church triumphant, those who've already triumphed, who've gone through life, and the Lord has brought them through to that wonderful reward, which is to be in His presence forever.

[3 : 55] But we're one of one heart, of one spirit, and of one song. So let's stand and sing 186. Let's come before our God in prayer.

Let us pray together. Worthy the Lamb. Lord, we know that is some of the song of heaven.

In one sense, the central song of heaven. Oh Lord, our God, is that there, your saints, your angels, are prostrate.

In that sense, bow down. But not bow down with a sense of burden or grief or sorrow. Not bow down with condemnation or conviction.

But bow down in awe. Bow down in wonder. Bow down in praise and honor and glory. Before you, who sits upon the throne and the Lamb.

[5 : 08] That wonderful Lamb of God, who John spoke about by the river Jordan. Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

That Lamb who was pierced for our transgressions. The Lamb who was silent before His slayers. Who opened not His mouth, but willingly bowed and submitted Himself to His Father's will.

Bowed and submitted Himself to His torturers, to His murderers, to His executors. Who bowed willingly to the cross. And even to death itself, we're told, He submitted Himself and was obedient.

We thank you that, Lord Jesus Christ, now in heaven. You still bear those wounds of sacrificial love.

There you still are the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

You still are the one whose precious blood cleanses from sin. You're still the one who has made full and complete atonement for sin.

[6 : 18] No more offering of yourself is necessary. For that once and for all offering of yourself at the cross has dealt with and done away with and removed all the punishment and all the shame of our sin.

And we thank you that those believers who've trusted in you throughout the ages. Who are one with us in spirit. That they are there before your presence.

Without any spot or wrinkle or stain. With nothing to spoil them or spoil their enjoyment or pleasure or delight in you.

And we thank you that those who have gone before us have paved the way in one sense. Led the way for us to follow. And Lord we thank you that even this evening. That those of us who know and have trusted you, Lord Jesus.

Those who've known, as it were, the washing of your precious blood. We too shall be there one day. Nothing in heaven or hell can stop that.

[7 : 19] Nothing even in our own failures and faultiness and doubts and struggles. Can prevent you from fulfilling your promises and your plan towards us, your dear children.

We too one day will be in the presence of the Father and the Son. We praise you and thank you, O Lord. That you have continued to keep us and to preserve us and to help us.

Until this day. And we know, Lord, that you will take us on. Help us as we sing your praises. Help us, Lord, as we gather around the table and remember the price that was paid for this great salvation.

Help us as we hear your word. In all aspects of our time together. May you be at work in us, O Lord. To change and transform.

To bless and do us good. And to equip us, O Lord. That we may live for your glory in this world.

Until you take us to glory in the next.

[8 : 22] We ask these things as we come now. In Jesus' name. Amen. Chapter 23. Now, those of you who are regulars, as it were, will know that we have been journeying through and studying the book of Exodus.

And in the beginning of the new year, we looked particularly at those Ten Commandments. And then we stopped. We took a break from Exodus. We went into Easter. And then we went into all sorts of things.

The summer and so on. But what I hope to do is in the coming evenings, the coming Sunday evenings, for us to return to Exodus and to finish this book.

Now, we're not going to do it perhaps as detailed as we did with the Ten Commandments or with the previous events. But I want us to look at some of the very important events in the life of God's people.

And relate them to ourselves as God's people today. Okay. So, Exodus 23. And I'm going to read from verse 20 through to 20 to the end of the chapter.

[9 : 29] So, verse 20 of chapter 23. That's page 81. Brilliant. Thank you so much. Reading through to the end of the chapter. I'll explain why I'm doing that when we come to the message itself.

Verse 20. See. This is the Lord God speaking. I'm sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.

Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him. He will not forgive your rebellion since my name is in him.

If you listen carefully to what he says and to all that I say. I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.

My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites. And I will wipe them out.

[10 : 38] Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces.

Worship the Lord your God and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away disease from among you and none will miscarry or be barren in your land.

I will give you a full life span. I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run.

I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them out in a single year. Because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you.

Little by little I will drive them out before you until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, from the desert to the Euphrates River.

[11:47] I will give into your hands the people who live in the land. And you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods.

Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me. Because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.

Do not let them live in your land.

Of that very briefly. And then come to this passage. And many of you will know this already. But just to remind you. Exodus begins with God's people. The descendants of Jacob.

In Egypt. And very soon it tells us they began to grow and to prosper. And increase in numbers. There was a great number of them. And the Egyptians got rather apprehensive and worried.

[13:05] And they enforced them into slavery. And for around about 400 years that was the condition and state of them. And it got worse. Because the Pharaoh, the ruler of that country of Egypt, decided that he needed to do something to stop the growth of the population.

And so he passed a law that all the sons that were born to Hebrew, Israelite women, were to be murdered. Would be thrown into the Nile. And drowned. But God had his people in the right place, the right time.

Godly midwives and so on. And they were faithful to the Lord. And so one young man was spared particularly. And a young boy by the name of Moses.

And you know how he grew up ultimately in the household of Pharaoh. Being the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. And around about the age of 40, he was moved to be concerned about his people, the Hebrews.

And through various events, ultimately he got chased out of the country. He thought he could do things in his own strength. And he ended up in the wilderness where he became a shepherd for another 40 years.

[14:16] So in the space of really chapters 1 to 3, over 100, maybe 200 years passed. But between chapter 3 and to where we are in chapter 23, only a matter of weeks has really passed.

A matter of months. Because God sent Moses back, telling him to go and to command Pharaoh to set God's people free. And with great power and authority through 10 plagues, God whittled down the resistance, the pride, the determination of Pharaoh.

So that ultimately he let the people go. We were told there's around about 600,000 men plus women plus children. Probably in the region of a couple of million people plus their herds, their flocks and so on.

And they went out into the desert, the Lord leading and guiding them with a pillar of fire and cloud. And then of course Pharaoh changed his mind and said, I think this is a bad thing.

I shouldn't have let them go. Gets all his chariots and his armies together, chases after them. And they are trapped between the Red Sea and between Pharaoh's army. But the Lord miraculously, marvelously parts the waters.

[15:31] And the people travel to safety. And the waters close. And so over the course of several weeks, they are traveling through the wilderness to this special mountain where God told Moses they were to go to worship the Lord.

And on the way, God provides them water from a rock so that they had plenty of supply. Provides them this miraculous, marvelous bread from heaven, which they called manna. And when they got to Sinai, as we found out when we finished in chapter 20 just a few months ago, God provided for them his law, his commands, his words.

And we recognize that these words, often called the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments, were God's gift of goodness and grace to his people.

Sometimes as Christians and others think that God's laws are things that we obey to make us right with God. But the reality was that God saved his people and then he gave them the law.

He didn't give them the law and then save them. It was grace that saved them and brought them into freedom. And that freedom was that now they were not under another form of slavery to law, but rather they were under the jurisdiction and the loving care and guidance and direction of their gods.

[16 : 54] And that's for that reason we looked at those Ten Commandments because we recognize that in them God reveals his will to us today and that they point us to the Lord Jesus and point us to living the Christian life and the blessings that God has for us.

Now why have I skipped over then from the end of chapter 20 into chapter 23? Because really what we have in chapters 21 and 22 and most of 23 are really the unfolding of the Ten Commandments that God has given.

A more detailed explanation of them, particularly how they were to be applied when the people reached the promised land. How they were to live out those commandments in their daily living. As we see there, if you look at chapter 22 and verse 5. If anyone grazes their livestock in a field or vineyard and so on. Well they haven't got fields and vineyards, they're all living in tents in the desert.

So it's clear that God is pointing them to, preparing them for the promised land. He talks about houses in chapter 22 verse 7. If anyone gives a neighbor silver or goods for safekeeping, they're stolen from the neighbor's house.

[18 : 04] And he talks about them sowing and reaping crops in chapter 23 and verse 10. Six years you're to sow your fields. Well none of these things were taking place at this time. They weren't going to take place ultimately for 40 years.

But God was preparing them for the blessings of the promised land. The promised land that he had assured them that they would arrive at. The reason he had saved them out of Egyptian slavery was to bring them into the blessings of a new homeland.

But the question is, well are they really going to make it there? That's going to be sort of as we go through these chapters as well. Are they going to make it to the promised land? How do they know for sure that they will actually arrive at that safe place?

All sorts of enemies, all sorts of nations that were opposed to them were in the way. There was also the problem of their own sin and their own failings and their own faults as we shall see as well.

And so I believe that when we get to chapter 23 verse 20, there seems to be a real change in emphasis. God's been giving these explanations of his law and working them out and how to apply them in daily life.

[19 : 15] And then in verse 20 he says, look or behold or see. And he begins to give them great encouragement to assure them that they shall arrive at the promised land.

That the Lord himself would provide for them and by his power they would safely bring them into the place that he had prepared for them. As well as those words of encouragement, there's also words of instruction still from the Lord.

Instruction that would help them to apply and live out God's will in the coming days before they reach the promised land, before they get there.

God's way for them as they journeyed through the wilderness. And I believe that when we come to chapter 23 and verse 20, as we have done before, we are right to apply God's word to ourselves.

We're right to understand that what God lays out as the principles of his leading and guiding and directing and caring for his people are principles that go all the way through the Bible, Old Testament and New and that apply to us today as well.

[20 : 30] One thing I think that is important for us to understand is that when God speaks, he's speaking to the whole community of God's people.

Notice that when we go back to chapter 20, after God has spoken about the commandments, he then says, verse 22, Then the Lord said to Moses, Tell the Israelites this.

And that carries on all the way through chapter 21, 22 until we get to, indeed, the end of chapter 23 where there is another change. Then the Lord said to Moses, then the Lord said to Moses, so all that he's been saying, he's saying to the whole community, saying to the whole body, as it were, of God's people.

The Old Testament church of our God. Now, I think that's very important that we recognize that at the start, that what God is saying, he's saying to all of them.

You see, we do live in an individualistic age. We live in an age where the concept of family is not as important as it was, let alone community.

[21 : 38] And that sense of it's me against the world and it's my life and my choices and my decisions has very much influenced the church as well.

So that there has been that sense of losing the understanding that as a believer, we are part of the church universal, which is the church of every believer, everyone.

But spiritually, but physically, we are part of a local church and that part of that local church, being part of that local church is of vital importance to us as individuals and important to the whole.

And so when we go through the Bible, we find again and again the stress upon unity, the stress upon being one, the stress upon being part of something greater than ourselves.

So we come to Paul, of course, and we find that again and again, he uses those pictures, those illustrations of the church, not just the church universal, but the local church. One body, talking to the Corinthians, who were a divided people, if you remember when we looked at them.

[22 : 44] If in Ephesians, he speaks about one building or one house. And whenever he writes letters, all of his letters bar one are directly written to the church in Rome or the church in Philippi or the church, the saints, not just to the leaders or the particular group.

His great concern was that the believers recognize they are part of one organism. They are to work together for the good of all and to the glory of Jesus.

Ephesians 4, 16, particularly from him, that's Jesus, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Last year, we went on holiday to Tenerife. And as always, I love swimming in the sea in Tenerife. The water is slightly warmer than Whitby.

And I was just sort of wading out, swimming out, and I saw what I knew was a Portuguese man of war. It's a very, very dangerous jellyfish.

[23 : 57] It's not actually a jellyfish at all. They're very rare in the UK, but I'd seen pictures of them before and I'd seen one, I think, many, many years ago. It resembles a jellyfish, but it is in fact, and bear with me, a Siphonophore.

A Siphonophore, which means actually it's a colony of four different creatures which are highly modified to depend upon one another and rely upon one another.

It's one of the things that evolutionists scratch their heads about and try to excuse and say, well, somehow it must have evolved. But it's impossible for each one of those parts to live by itself.

Each one ultimately relies upon, depends upon the other three. And without the other three, the one would die. But then they're not one creature, but they appear as one.

Well, in the church, that's what we're to be like. It's a Siphonophore. We're to be those who cannot function alone. We're to be those who, even if we think we can, recognize that we mustn't try to make it on our own, but that we depend upon one another, that we are a living organism, that we rely upon and receive from one another those things that we lack in ourselves.

[25 : 20] There's not one of us in this local church or in any local church that can do without the fellowship, the support, the prayer, the encouragement, the teaching, the example, and so on of the other members of the church.

And so this is what I think is important for us to grasp, that as a church, as a local church here and whatever local church you are a part of, that if we are to go forward in the things of God, if we are to move forward as individual believers, then we can only move forward with and alongside and united to other believers as well.

And that brings us back here to Exodus and God's people. Right up to this point, God has been dealing with them as one people.

Yes, he set apart Moses to this position of leading and ministering to the church, but they all came out of Egypt. They all traveled through the desert.

Hebrews makes the point very clearly. They all passed through the Red Sea. They all drank from one rock. They all ate the manna. They all received the law. And now God speaks to them all these words of encouragement and instruction, which they are to receive together and to respond to together.

[26 : 48] Now what does God have to say to them that he says to us? What does he have to say to them which helps us as we seek to move forward as a church, as we seek to move forward in Whitby Evangelical Church?

Three things, very simply, that I want us to notice as we move forward. First of all, we together follow one leader.

To move forward, we have to follow one leader. Notice what he says. Behold, see, look, pay attention. I'm sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way, to bring you to the place

I've prepared.

Now he doesn't say, look, I've given you Moses to protect you, provide for you, for you to follow him. Nor any other of the leaders, which we hear about and read about later on, but an angel.

He was to go and notice be their guardian angel, if I can put it that way. To lead them, to protect them, to act on their behalf. It was his responsibility to bring them through the wilderness, to bring them through the struggles and the difficulties that they faced, and bring them into the promised land.

[28 : 07] Now this angel isn't mentioned very often in Exodus. He's mentioned earlier on in chapter 14 and verse 19, where we're told, this is after they had left Egypt and were on their way to the Red Sea.

Then the angel of God, who'd been travelling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. And the other place he's mentioned is later on in chapter 32 and verse 34, where God says to Moses, Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you.

So the angel's mentioned about going before, again and again, but we're not told ever of any specific things that he does. We're not told of any specific actions that he performs, or things that he does to help the people.

Yet God stresses how imperative it is that they should follow this angel, and do all that this angel tells them to do. Why?

Well, it's clear, isn't it, when we read that the Lord and this angel are one and the same, or very much in the sense that they speak of the same mind.

[29 : 24] Notice God says there, Do not rebel against him. He will not forgive your rebellion since my name is in him. And notice this, If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say.

He says, I say. Clearly, as we've recognised before, and as we recognise in other parts of the Old Testament, here is the second person of the Trinity.

Here is the Son of God manifesting himself before he comes in the flesh. Acting on behalf of the Lord, with the Lord's authority, with the Lord's name upon him, to the blessing of the Lord's people. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who is the eternal Son of God. And notice that it was dependent upon their faithfulness to him, their obedience to him, the blessing of the whole company.

Pay attention, verse 21, to him. Listen to what he says. If you listen carefully, verse 22, to what he says, Do what I say. I'll be an enemy to your enemies.

[30 : 40] I'll oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you. And so on. To rebel against him would spell disaster.

To follow and obey him would bring success. It was as simple, as straightforward as that. But that brings us then to the church. If we as a church of God's people, a local church, who are we to follow?

Who is to be the one who leads us? Who is the one who is our guardian? Is it the pastor? No. Just as in this case, it was not anybody human, if I can put it that way.

It's not the deacons, or the elders, or the minister, or any other person, or a bishop, or a pope, or whoever you want to place there. Because whenever a church follows a man or a woman, it always ends in disunity and disruption.

Remember when we've been studying through 1 Corinthians earlier this year, we saw how Paul had to speak to the church in Corinth. Because what was it? One was saying, I follow Paul.

[31 : 45] Some were saying, I follow Apollos. Some were saying, I follow Cephas. And what was the end result? Utter chaos, with all sorts of terrible sins, and bad behavior following.

No. Who has God given to us, as a local church, that we must hear his words and obey him? Well, it's the same person. It's the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ to them, but now it is the post-incarnate, the one who's come in the flesh, the one who has died for our sins, the one who's risen again, the one who is alive forevermore, the one who speaks to his churches in Revelation.

We've been looking at those together. The one who acts on our behalf, the one, the writer of Hebrews says, who ever lives to make intercession for us, ever lives to work for our good.

Remember when Jesus walked on the earth, what was it that he said to those disciples, those men who were cleaning their nets? He said to them, follow me. Follow me.

[32 : 49] Again and again, that was often the case. That was his command. Follow me. And he was quite clear in calling people to follow him and to obey his words.

So the question for us as a church, as a church, is this. Are we following Christ? Are we following Jesus?

And are we obedient to his word? Do we recognize him as the one leader of the church? The one head?

The one sovereign? The one guardian? Is our faith, our trust, our reliance solely and completely upon him for the church? You know, sometimes churches can get into a place where they place their faith and trust in their young people.

Or if only we had more young families. Or they look to the young people and say, well, we've got these young people so the future of the church is secure. And perhaps we have expectations of them which are unrealistic.

[33 : 54] Or we, a church may say, well, now we've got a new pastor and he's a, he's a, he's a young chap and he's got lots of energy. And, and of course his wife is really good with kids. And, and, well, we know the future of the church is safe because they're going to, they're going to revive the church.

They're going to, they're going to restore the, the lost glory of the church from years past. All of those things are wrong. They will always let us down.

But Christ will not. We must, dear friends, ensure that our hope, our trust, our faith for the church of Jesus Christ, for the, for the ongoing work of the gospel here or wherever we are from is because we trust in Jesus.

He is the Lord of the church. He is the one who said, I will build my church. He is the savior of the church. He's the fulfiller of all his own promises. The second thing that we see here is this.

And it's quite peculiar in one sense. And it's from the, verses 27 and following. We've been told about the importance of obedience to Christ, obedience to his word, obedience to it.

[35 : 09] And again, that's something that I think, I hope that as a church, we, we, we, we hold to. Though there is still always for all of us much work to be done. Are we always applying the Bible to every aspect of the decisions we make as a church?

But I don't want to spend any more time on that. The second thing is that we see here that we not only work, move together following one savior, we move together at one speed.

One speed. Notice what God says there. Verse 27, I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I'll make all your enemies turn their backs and run.

I'll drive the, send the horned ahead of you. But, verse 29, I will not drive them out in a single year because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you.

Little by little, I will drive them out before you. We live in a world that's in a hurry, don't we? We live in a world that is always full on, full speed.

[36 : 17] There's no time to waste. There's no time to hang back. Everything must be done instantly. Instant communication. Instant coffee.

Instant. We can get caught up in that as a church. We can get caught up in that idea that somehow the church should be changing faster. The church should be moving faster.

Things should be happening quicker. Church should be growing quicker. Achieving things quicker. All around about us, society is changing quickly.

Even if you were given a copy of the recent Evangelical Times, Evangelical News, you'll see that there one of the government ministers is telling the church to catch up with society, particularly on the matter of homosexual marriage.

Catch up with society. And we can become impatient, can't we, as Christians as well? Not about bad things, but even about good things. Impatient. Lord, why isn't it that more people are being saved?

[37 : 18] Why is it that we feel as if we're just not making real headway and progress into this community or into people's lives or whatever? Well, God assures his people not only that they would enter into the blessings that he had in store for them, but he promised them that he was going to accomplish his purposes for them little by little.

Little by little. We don't like that. We want big by big, large by large. Little by little. Little by little. But that makes sense, doesn't it? When you think about it, if we are to move together as a church, then it has to be little by little.

I don't know when was the last time you ran in a three-legged race. It may have been for you 50, 60 years ago. Even longer. But you know what? If you're in a three-legged race, you're tied to

somebody.

If you both try to run really fast, clap right on your faces, isn't it? You've got to go steady, steady, steady, steady together. So it is with the church.

The Lord has put us together, not that some may seem to rush ahead and others may lag behind, but that rather together we may move forward little by little. God was not going to drive out the wicked and evil people who possessed that land, and they were wicked and evil.

[38 : 40] We know about that because they would sacrifice their own children to their gods. They were not going to attain all the land which God had given them in a matter of days or weeks or months.

In fact, God says to them, I will not drive them out in a single year. You're going to be there for years, going through battles and progress, until at last the land is completely vanquished.

Why? Why was God going to do that? Why was God going to act so slowly? Was it because the people were useless in battle?

They were such bad soldiers that there was no way they'd be able to do it because, was it because the Hittites and the other ites were so hard and difficult and God would have a real struggle in pushing them back?

No, of course it wasn't for any of those reasons. It wasn't a lack in God. It wasn't even a lack in God's people because the Lord was going to do it himself. It wasn't about their strength or even their faith, but God had a reason.

[39 : 50] Look at what he says, I will not drive them out in a single year because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you until you've increased enough to take possession of the land.

I've got a reason behind the things that I do. God always has a reason for the things that he does and he has a reason for the way that he does the things that he does. He never acts simply because, oh, well, it's a reaction to the circumstances.

He never acts in a way which is bogged down because of tradition. He acts with wisdom and with love for the good of his church. Notice he's doing this for their good.

If I drove all the enemies out, says God, what would happen is that because there's not enough of you to fill the land, what animals would take over the vineyards and the fields? It would make it even more difficult for you.

So does with us today, dear friends. The reason that God is working at the speed that he is working at in our church is because he has a reason for that.

[41 : 01] Again, there can be that blame culture account there that we have and it's a terrible thing. Christians in churches can become discouraged by the progress and the forward moving of the church and the changes and say, oh, it's those group of hardliners there.

Oh, they're always holding us back. They're always going on about the past and, oh, well, it's that pastor. Oh, he's so boring when he preaches.

If we had somebody who was more exciting and interesting, we like a blame culture, don't we?

Now, there may be some truth in some of those things but ultimately, if Christ is the head of this church, if he is the one who we follow and who we take our lead from, then ultimately he is the one that we are to keep in step with and to follow and we must be very careful that we don't look for, as it were, blaming one another for certain things.

Actually, it may well be that part of the blame is in our hearts. Am I really as prayerful as I could be about the work of the gospel? Am I really as devoted and dedicated to the work of Christ here in this local church?

But ultimately, God has a reason and it's for our good. He knows the speed at which we can move. He knows that sometimes radical, fast change can be very destructive and harmful for a church.

[42 : 31] It can split a church at times. It's important that we move forward. It's important that we're growing. That's the vital thing. Now, if we're not moving at all, if as a church or at any church we find ourselves that we are stagnant and we are unchanged and we are unmoving and we are simply sort of locked down, then that is a serious concern because life always produces change.

We know that in our own bodies, we know that in our children, we know that in the world around about us when you plant a seed or whatever, if there's life, there's change, there's growth. It may be very small to see, it may be very easy to see.

But if there's change, if there's life, if there's growth, no matter what the speed, no matter how much of a hurry we may be in, we need to do it together.

We need to grow together, move together, go forward. It wasn't any, there's no good some of them rushing into the land and rushing here and rushing there and trying to possess all the land and driving out all the enemies because God recognized that if they were to do that, they would not be able to keep it up.

Very soon, they'd burn out and very soon, things would go wrong. One last thing, dear friends. One last thing. The third thing that we apply from these words is this, that we together follow one leader. [43 : 57] We together walk at one pace, one speed. We together work to one purpose, one goal. God was going to send his people into the promised land and in that promised land there was going to be something that they were to do.

Yes, they were to drive out those nations, drive out those tribes with their immoral worship but ultimately what were they to do? They were going to be those who lived lives to the worship of the Lord, to the glory of God.

They were going to be an example to the nations around about them. They were not to take on board the practices of those nations. Their practice was, verse 25, worship the Lord your God. Their practice was not to make a covenant with them or their gods because what would happen is that very soon they would simply sink into the same activities, the same practices, the same sins as the word about them.

Their purpose was to be a distinct people for gods. Now what is it that we are looking for when we're talking about change and forward momentum in the life of the church?

[45 : 09] Ultimately, we are looking for in our church and amongst our own lives and the lives of individuals and as a people, we are looking for more of the glory of God to be revealed, more Christ-likeness, more love, more faith, more service, more of those things that show that we are distinctly the people of God.

God. One of the great tragedies in the church in the UK of the last hundred or more years is that large parts of the church have felt that the way that they can reach men and women for the gospel is to become more and more like the men and women of the world.

And so that's the reason for that MP's comments. Church, get up to speed with society. Do the things that society expects you to do. Follow its patterns.

Be like it. Now as a church we are to have distinctives. Not distinctives in that we dress strangely or we speak strangely or that we somehow are just weird.

Anybody can be weird. The Monster Raving Loony Party is weird. No, distinctives which are of course the distinctives of the person of Christ. As I said, there's distinct, what set him apart?

[46 : 27] There was compassion for the people. There was love. There was a willing to accept, to receive. There was a going to those in need. There was something about him, wasn't there?

Dear friends, we're to be those people who are attractive with the gospel. Not a stumbling block but whose lives bear witness to the fact that God has radically changed and transformed us and that as his people in this community we want to live lives of holiness, set apart for him.

Testifying that we are his people so that in this community glory and honour is given to him as men and women seek him and put their faith in him. That's been the purpose that God had for his church in the Old Testament all the way through.

He said to them and promised them in chapter 19 and verse 5, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession although the whole earth is mine you will be to me or for me rather a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

That's where they failed sadly. That was their calling though to be God's treasured possession a special people among the nations. That's our calling yours and mine as a church as a company of God's people to be together God's precious possession his treasure his holy people his kingdom of priests.

[48 : 04] To do that we can only do it together and by God's grace and God's help as we continue to look into his word we believe that the Lord will lead us into the purposes he has for us.

We're going to prepare our hearts now to come to the Lord's table and to do so we're going to sing a hymn a lovely hymn that reminds us again what is the very centre of the Lord's table what is the very centre of our faith what is the centre of all that we are about as a church on the cross on the cross 257 and we'll stand and sing this hymn together and then those who are going to serve will

come to the front and we'll share in the Lord's supper 257 game