

## January 22nd

# Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

## Welcome & Prayer

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's begin with a prayer by the puritan David Clarkson: Jesus Christ, your love withheld nothing from us: not your life—you gave your life as a ransom for us. Not your blood—you washed us in your blood. O boundless love! Oh, the unsearchable riches of your love. O happy souls that have interest in this love, in these riches. Amen.

## Hymn: Praise My Soul The King Of Heaven

1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
to his feet your tribute bring.  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
evermore his praises sing.  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Praise the everlasting King!

2 Praise him for his grace and favor  
to his people in distress.  
Praise him, still the same as ever,  
slow to chide, and swift to bless.  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Glorious in his faithfulness!

3 Fatherlike he tends and spares us;  
well our feeble frame he knows.  
In his hand he gently bears us,  
rescues us from all our foes.  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Widely yet his mercy flows!

4 Angels, help us to adore him;  
you behold him face to face.  
Sun and moon, bow down before him,  
dwellers all in time and space.  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Praise with us the God of grace!

## Bible Reading – Isaiah 45:22-23

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; truth has gone out of my mouth, a word that will not be revoked: Every knee will bow to me, every tongue will swear allegiance to me.

## Announcements 22/1/22

**Focus for January – Rest & Refresh.** I encourage you to briefly do three things each night: *review, remember, and rest.*

- First, *review.* Take a moment to review your day, noting gifts, expressing gratitude, asking for forgiveness, strength, and wisdom in due measure.
- Second, *remember:* God is compassionate, he loves his children, he is near and working. Remember that he will never leave you or forsake you or his church. Remember his promises and that the gospel is genuinely good news.
- Third, *rest:* The day is done, so lay it at the feet of God. You don't need to do anything else today. But more importantly, your sins are covered, so rest in that assurance. Do not let them taunt you or linger in your head or heart: Jesus declared, "It is finished." Be confident that his mercies will

be new yet again tomorrow morning when you rise, no matter what uncertainties you face and what weaknesses you feel. (An excerpt from *You're Only Human* by Kelly Kapic, p. 218).

**Regular Activities of our Church** will be in recess until NSW public schools are back on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January. Our hope is that you will come each Sunday for worship (and help out where needed) and enjoy a rest from church activities for the rest of the week.

Kids Church over the School Holidays. As per the bulletin for Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> December

**CHURCH CAMP.** Theme "Family Reunion" Details on Facebook or pick up a handout. Dates: 3-5<sup>th</sup> March 2023. All registrations need to be in by Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January.

**Kids and Families Worker (approx. 8-10 hours a week).** With Suzie leaving our position in January this year, we will be advertising and interviewing prospective candidates for her replacement in Feb/March this year. For more details please see Jon or Stephen.

**Small Groups.** Why not consider joining a small group in 2023? They are a great way to grow in your faith and to strengthen ties with other Christians. We run groups for men and women, young and old, day and night, ZOOM and live, weekly or fortnightly. You are sure to find a group that will suit you. Just see Jon, Stephen or one of the elders.

**Family Fellowship.** Stephen and Kaylen are hosting a BBQ and swim at their place (19 Imperial Close, Floraville) on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January from 12:15 pm for all families that have at least one child in Years 4-9. If that is you, please come along. RSVP to Stephen on 0426 829080 before Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January. It is hoped that there will be a regular social event for these families on the last weekend of each month.

## Song – Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

1. O soul, are you weary and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?  
There's light for a look at the Savior,  
And life more abundant and free!

Refrain:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.

2. Thro' death into life everlasting,  
He passed, and we follow Him there;  
O'er us sin no more hath dominion--  
For more than conqu'rors we are!

3. His Word shall not fail you--He promised;  
Believe Him, and all will be well:  
Then go to a world that is dying,  
His perfect salvation to tell!

## Pastoral Prayer

Save your people, O Lord, and bless your heritage; feed them, and lift them up for ever. Give strength to your people, and bless your people with peace; surround them with your favour as with a shield.

Pray for Nigeria: Pray for the dismantling of widespread corruption which cripples all levels of society – especially the government and including the church. Pray for an emphasis on discipleship and balanced Bible teaching in the Nigerian church, which continues to experience massive growth but whose teaching is often syncretistic and prosperity – based. Pray for increasingly persecuted Christians in Islamised northern states to be characterised by supernatural love and forgiveness.

## Bible Reading – Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hinderance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes of Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

## Sermon – The Race of Faith (Jon Brown)

You might have seen the film Chariots of Fire about the Scottish sprinter, Eric Liddell. In the 1924 Olympics Eric refused to compete in the 100m sprint. It required him to run on a Sunday and Eric was a Christian. Instead he ran the 400m and ended up winning the gold medal. Although he's considered a hero today, back when it happened many folks in Great Britain laughed and mocked Eric for pulling out. They mocked him for his faith. But most people didn't realise Eric was running a more important race. The Olympics was a great race. But Eric was running the greatest race - the race of faith.

That's how the author to the Hebrews describes it here: "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Everything he's been saying so far is wrapped up in this theme. We're not told to stroll through the Christian life, but to run! It takes energy. It takes perseverance. If we're going to finish this race we're going to need to do these three things:

1. The Fans cheering us on
2. The Freedom from entanglements
3. The Finish line in our sights

1. The Fans Cheering us on (v. 1a)

You might have seen the runner Patrick Tiernan's heroic finish in the 10km run at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. He collapsed about 100m from the finish line. But then he got back up and finished the race.

And later in an interview Patrick said about his race, "I have a great circle of people around me. And a great country of people who've got my back and supporting me the whole way." The fans cheering you on as you on makes all the difference. And that's what every Christian has in their race of faith. Check it out, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...run."

Here we have the summary of chapter 11. Where the author stacked up all the greats of the OT. And he did it to encourage the Hebrew believers in their race of faith. They were thinking of giving up. It's too hard. Like Patrick Tiernan they were at the point of collapse. And so he reminds all those who've run the race before us. And crossed the finish line by faith. And now they fill the stadium, cheering others on in their race.

Noah in the stadium yelling out, "Keep preaching the gospel. Keep warning of the judgment to come. And keep inviting people into Christ our ark."

Abraham cheering, "Run! Keep going. God is faithful! There's a better country to come. There's the heavenly city."

Moses cheering, "Run! It's all worth it in the end! Christ is more precious than all the riches of the world."

Rahab, cheering "It doesn't matter what you've done! If you trust in Jesus you will be saved!"

Whether all who've finished the race are in heaven looking down on us is beside the point. The main point is that they all ran the race. They all crossed the finish line. And now they testify to us that by faith in Christ we can finish too.

We can persevere to the end. Don't go back. Hang on in there. The fans are cheering you on. And...

## 2. The Freedom from entanglements (v. 1b)

In a race, you need to get rid of everything that's gonna trip you up! "Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely..." I'm pretty sure in the ancient games literally everything was taken off, and they ran nude. That's one way to make sure you're free from entanglements isn't it! But if you're serious about running, you don't wanna be tripping over your shoe laces. Or wearing your big puffer jacket. You wanna be completely free to run.

The point is: we have to part with everything that hinders our race. And just like each of us is called to run the race set before us. And that will look different. We all have different challenges. In the same way each of us will have different things to throw off. Different things that weigh us down in our race.

What are some of those things that can weigh us down? Maybe you're here tonight and you have cares and concerns you're carrying. Stuff you're really worried or stressed about. Stuff that's too heavy for you. Well if that's you then you can cast your cares upon your Heavenly Father, because he cares for you. Throw it off!

Or it may be an idol that's weighing you down. A good thing that's turned into a God thing. Remember the rich young ruler in the Gospels? (Matthew 19:16-22). And the young man comes and asks Jesus "What must I do to have eternal life?" And Jesus lists the commandments. And the young man says, "I've kept all these. What do I still lack?" And Jesus says, "go sell what you possess and give to the poor. And come follow me." And we're told, when the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. This isn't saying every Christian needs to be a monk. It doesn't mean we need to sell our house and move to the desert. Jesus is putting his finger on the young man's idol. What was it? For him it was his wealth. His possessions. That's why he went away sorrowful. He wasn't willing to part with it. That was his weight that held him back from running.

Is there anything you're not willing to give up for Christ? Is there anything that if it was taken away, you would be absolutely crushed? That's how we work out our idol.

Idols hinder us from running. Because they consume all our time, our thoughts, our energy, our money. And then when it doesn't work out we blame God. It could be a relationship. It could be sport. It could be music. It could be beauty. It could be fitness and health. It could be money. It could be ministry. These are good things that turn into God things. It's our hearts that turn them into idols. So what we have to do is cut the cord between our affections and the earthly things. It doesn't mean we have to give up doing these things all together. All though it might.

But it does mean we need to cut the cord that's weighing us down. Be ready to give it up, like Abraham putting Issac on the altar. And when we do - that we're free to run. Like Nicola McDermott, it was

after she decided to pursue God over sport that she could really jump. Before her idol was sport and that weighed her down. But when she cut the cord she was free from entanglements and could soar.

John Owen said if you're not killing sin it will be killing you. Sin as described as clinging to us... like a snake that entangles itself around us. And chokes the life out of us. If we want to make progress in the Christian life we gotta be ruthless about our sin.

So let me ask you, how serious are you about getting rid of that sin in your life? If those algorithms on Youtube are causing you to stumble, get off it. If that TV show is causing you to stumble, stop watching it. If you're phone is tripping you up, throw it away. We're all tempted in different ways, but you know what it is in your life? Take Joseph for instance. Remember when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. And she grabbed his coat. And he bolted. And left her, hanging on to the coat. What an embarrassment running away half naked! But he didn't care. He was throwing off the weight and running his race of faith. "How can I sin against my God?" He said.

Joseph had the finish lines in his sights. The end goal. And that's the last thing we all need to do to run this race is have....

### 3. The Finish Line in our sights (v. 2)

Run the race... "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith." Here is the best definition of faith - looking to Jesus. Don't look at your sin. Don't look within. Look at him. You look at your sin for too long and you'll get discouraged in your race. For every one look at your sin take ten looks at Jesus. As the hymn goes:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
 Look full in his wonderful face  
 And the things of earth will grow strangely dim.  
 In the light of his glory and grace.

And Don't look within. If you're looking down at your feet while running you'll trip over won't you? Don't look at your own performance. Am I reading the Bible enough. Am I praying enough? Am I witnessing enough? Am I being generous enough? Faith is looking to Jesus. If we look at our own performance we'll be miserable. Because how can we know if we've ever done enough? Self-salvation is dead end. There is only One Saviour - Jesus. That's what his name means does't it? You shall call him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. And we don't look to Him as an example. Lots of people fall into that trap don't they? But if Jesus is only our example that's not good news. How can you and I live like Him? We can't. He not our example but our Saviour. The gospel isn't WWJD. But What Has Jesus Done. And all anyone needs to do to be saved is Look to Him.

That's the message that converted Charles Spurgeon. He was a young fella - teenager. One day he wanted to go to church, but there was a massive snowstorm. And he could only get to a little methodist church around the corner. When he got there. There was virtually no one there. And the minister couldn't get there because of the snowstorm. And a lay man got up and preached. And he was a an average preacher (which is encouragement!). All he did was get up and read a text. And then just exhort. And the text was: Isaiah 45:22 - "Look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth."

And the man began to explain the text. He said, “you don’t even have to lift a finger to look”. Spurgeon remembers him saying, “You don’t have to be worth a a thousand pounds a year in order to look. You don’t have to have anything true about you to look. You don’t have to be good or bad.

And then he said, “Don’t look to yourselves. There’s no hope there.”

And finally he lifted up his voice. And he put the words in Jesus mouth, and he said,

“Look to Me! I am sweating great drops of blood.  
Look to me, I’m hanging on the cross.  
Look to me, I’ve died and I’m buried.  
Look to me! I’m risen, and ascended. And I’m going to the right hand of the Father! Look to me!”

And then he looked out, and there were only three or four people there. And he looked out and saw this young man, Spurgeon. And he said, “Young man, you look miserable. And you’re going to be miserable. You’re going to be miserable in life and in death if you don’t obey my text.” And at that moment, this is what Spurgeon said, “I was ready to have somebody tell me I needed to do fifty things in order to get salvation. And suddenly he realised he just had to look! He realised he’d been looking at himself. This is what he said, “Oh I looked, and I looked, until I almost looked my eyes away.”

Maybe you’re here this morning and you’re miserable. Maybe you’re here and you’ve got no joy and the word seems boring. To you I say, lift up your eyes - not to me but to Jesus! Look how much he loves you! Maybe you’re here and you haven’t started the race. Why not begin now? All you need to do is Look to Jesus to become a Christian.

And from then on Looking to Jesus is a continual act. As Tim Keller said, “the gospel isn’t the ABCs of the Christian life. It’s the A-Z.” In all that we do, we’re to be constantly looking to Christ. Don’t take your eyes off Him. Jesus Himself is the finish line. Keep him in your sights. He started this good work in you. And he will bring you through. How can we be sure? Because endured the cross for you. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God. Here we get a glimpse into the heart of Jesus. It brought him the greatest joy to die for us so that we can be saved.

He ran the race and his finish line was death on a cross.  
We can run the race and get glory at the end.  
He got murder. We get the medal.  
He got the cross. We get the crown.  
He got torture. We get triumph.

You know Eric Liddell used to run with his head lifted up. Forest Gump quote...run, Christian, run! Run.....  
Run!

The stadium is full of fans, cheering you on.  
Free yourself from entanglements; throw off the weight and sin. And keep the finish line I your sights -  
looking always to Jesus.

**Prayer:**

Jesus Christ, without you, earth would be hell  
And heaven would not be heaven.

For you are the hope of the earth  
And the glory of heaven.

May we run the race set before us, looking to You - the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Amen.

**Song of Response – By Faith**

By faith, we see the hand of God  
In the light of creation's grand design;  
In the lives of those who prove His faithfulness,  
Who walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith, our fathers roamed the earth  
With the power of His promise in their hearts  
Of a holy city built by God's own hand –  
A place where peace and justice reign.

We will stand as children of the promise,  
We will fix our eyes on Him, our soul's reward.  
Till the race is finished and the work is done,  
We'll walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith, the prophets saw a day  
When the longed-for Messiah would appear  
With the power to break the chains of sin and  
death,  
And rise triumphant from the grave.

By faith, the church was called to go  
In the power of the Spirit to the lost  
To deliver captives and to preach good news,  
In every corner of the earth.

By faith, this mountain shall be moved  
And the power of the gospel shall prevail,  
For we know in Christ all things are possible  
For all who call upon His name.

**Closing Words:** Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hinderance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.