

Scotch Broth Service

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Preacher: Robin Giles

- [0 : 00] It's been a brilliant day, hasn't it? I don't know, it reminds me of stuff I've forgotten all about. Some of you I'd known very well, and yet my memory failed me.
- I don't know if that's the same for you. But it's been brilliant to renew old friendships, to be reminded of things that had happened. Good things, and not such good things sometimes, but that's what the church is like, isn't it?
- I don't know about you, but there are lots of phrases in everyday speech that I find quite irritating. I could give you a fairly lengthy list, but one in particular that gets me going is when people talk about their plans for the future going forward.
- Maybe you say that, so I apologise. Going forward as if it were possible to go backwards or stay where you are. It seems to me that lots of these expressions are simply redundant.
- You hear them a lot in news broadcasts, or where people are expressing their opinions, so that they don't appear to be saying nothing. They just pad out what they are saying with these unnecessary phrases, so that it sounds as though they're saying a lot of erudite stuff.
- [1 : 21] Simply allow them to take up our time with empty words. Does it annoy you? Maybe you say it, so it doesn't. Maybe you've never thought about it. Nonetheless, going forward says a lot to me.
- And I'm repeating some of what's been said already. I apologise for that. But as I say, we can't move backwards in time. We can't stay in the present. The present has gone as soon as we've experienced it.
- In a real sense, it hardly existed at all. But we are all moving forward. And that brought to mind the question, what are we really doing when we celebrate an anniversary like this?
- It's a major milestone in the history of this fellowship. And I count myself very blessed that I was part of it for a number of years, mainly through the 70s.
- I came in 1969 to work at the Scottish Prant Reading Station. It doesn't exist now. And then moved down to Cambridge later on in the late, well, in the 80s actually. And I have many good memories of that time on my own Christian journey.
- [2 : 28] I remember with great fondness and thankfulness some of the men and women of the church from that era. They taught me, some of you are here actually.
- They taught me many things and helped me to work through some of the difficult challenges that are involved in Christian teaching. That's not to say that I ended up agreeing with all of them.
- But they helped me to see where biblical teaching needed to be clarified, I think anyway. Some of them might be quite horrified to know where I've ended up, but I don't want to get into any of that just now.
- One of the highlights for me in those days was the Friday night Bible reading. Anybody remember that? Room 3? I was looking at room 3 today and it's totally changed. If only we had those seats in there then.

Maybe we could sleep through some of that stuff. But I really enjoyed those Friday night Bible readings. And so you know I'm really deranged now, don't you? In those days it was an opportunity for mainly men, it has to be said, to chew over some of the difficult passages in Scripture.

[3 : 37] I remember the first time they asked me to lead one of those studies. We were somewhere in the book of Revelation, probably chapter 7, because I remember getting the identity of the 144,000 wrong.

Or did I? I was too green to see those pitfalls and I duly took the challenge. As a young person, I was only 22 years old, I think.

I had no real study aids of my own apart from the Bible, so I took myself off to the George IV Bridge Library and found all the wrong commentaries, as it turned out.

I walked past that library today and I was intrigued to notice that over the doorway it says, Let there be light. I don't know if you haven't noticed that. Would that prayer have been answered on that day?

Anyway, maybe it was, who knows? My thoughts were not in, or the thoughts of those commentaries, let's say, were not in line with Cyrus Schofield, the only authority that really mattered, it seemed, to some.

[4 : 40] And when I had laboured through my introduction on the following Friday evening, I was graciously thanked by dear old Mr. Leaf, who was a very gracious man, who commented that I hoped I didn't mind if they didn't agree with me.

Talk about being dropped in at the deep end. But it was a good discipline for me, those Friday evenings, because it helped me sort out quite a few things which have stood me in good stead in subsequent ministry.

There were some great saints of God among those men, and women, of course. One I remember with particular fondness was Wee William McCann. Anybody remember him? Sweet William, he would sometimes jokingly call himself.

He was a humble soul, of small stature, but a giant of God. On one particular Friday evening, I was sitting just behind him where I could see, because they had benches there, not those comfy seats.

I was sitting just behind him, and I could see the notes he had studiously prepared for that evening's study. I can't remember what the subject study was, but he had made three alliterated points.

[5 : 54] This is one of the sins of preachers, alliteration. And all those points, those three points, began with the letter E. I remember that quite clearly. I can't remember what the other two points were, but his third point was illumination.

So he wasn't the best educated man among God's people, but he was truly a man of God. In fact, it's been my experience that it has not been so much the erudite among God's people who have influenced me most.

It has been the more humble men and women of faith who have demonstrated to me what a true believer should really look like. And I'm particularly grateful for William McCann and his dear wife as they supported and prayed for us, myself and Elizabeth, when my spiritual life jumped the tracks.

Some of you may remember that time. I'm not going to go into any details. There were others too who supported us through that very difficult time. And I shall be eternally grateful for their faithfulness in prayer for us.

I could go on reminiscing. I'm not going to. Some who are here this evening are among those who have helped shape me as a Christian and whose example and experience have blessed me far more than they will ever know.

[7 : 18] Good to recall the past, isn't it? There's a danger there. I think one of the most difficult things about church life is managing change.

We've talked a lot about change tonight, haven't we? We've all thought a lot. How things were, how things are now, how things might be in the future. Change must happen. And change is here to stay, as someone once wisely said.

But problems arise when we want to hold on to the ways we always used to do things. Please don't hear me wrongly. I'm not advocating abandoning scripture or godly standards.

But I have certainly come across dear saints of God who have wanted to hold on to what one godly lady from my time here in Edinburgh called the old paths. It's a reference to Jeremiah 6.16, which says, This is what the Lord says.

Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths. Ask where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your souls. In that case, the issue, the old path, the issue of that time was whether or not we should have tea or coffee served after the morning service.

[8 : 35] There's great value in looking back. And please don't hear me saying otherwise. That's one of the great blessings of baptism, for example. As we look back to the day, that day should be an anchor for the soul.

The day we finally submitted to the Lordship of Christ. A day that should remind us of where we have been in our Christian journey and encouragement to keep going.

The prophet Isaiah bids the people of ancient Israel, Look to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.

Isaiah 51 verse 1. We need those kinds of milestones so that as we look back, we can see that we are not what we were. And that should encourage us to press forward, to become more of what Jesus wants us to be.

We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's son. That's what he wants us to be like. So as we celebrate 50 years of God's goodness, as we reflect on the past and how God has shaped us, and the church through a half century, let's not live in the past.

[9 : 52] Let's use the past to instruct us and encourage us. But in the words of Paul to the Philippian church, Philippians 3 verse 13. But one thing I do, he says, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

And then he says, verse 15 and 16, all of us who are mature should take such a view of things. Anyone here mature? And if on some point Paul says you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for the past.

And for many of us here, as we think back over 50 years, perhaps for some of us it's not been as long as that, because we were not born 50 years ago.

But Lord, all of our lives you have been shaping us. You have been calling us to that aim of our predestination, to be like Jesus. And we thank you for the measure in which that has been achieved.

[11 : 13] The Apostle Paul talks again about being changed from one degree of glory to another. And we thank you for that daily experience of your Holy Spirit in our lives, moving us, challenging us to be holy people.

And so we thank you for the past. We thank you from the rock from which we were hewn. But Lord, we look to you for the future. For the future, take us, says one more modern song.

Lord, we pledge ourselves this night. To be your people. To be whatever you call us to be. And we pray that you will help us to set aside all that will hinder that aim, that end.

We pray that by your Spirit you will move within us to give us wisdom to perceive where you are calling us and how you are calling us. What work you call us to do.

That we may bring glory to you. And that we may bring blessing to many people. Those among whom you call us to serve both in the church and in the wider community.

[12 : 25] Lord, we think of the precious souls out there who need to hear about Jesus. And we pray that you will equip us and enable us, motivate us.

You have called us. Help us to be faithful to that calling, we pray. Amen. And may many more precious souls be added to your kingdom because of the witness of our church and of us personally.

Lord, we give you grateful thanks for all that is past and for all that is to come. In Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.