

'At Home Service' - Sunday 16 January, 2022 - Prepared by Graham Skedgell

Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. (Psalm 36 verse 5)

Hymn

“Great is Thy faithfulness,” O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not,
Thy compassions they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

*“Great is Thy faithfulness!”
“Great is Thy faithfulness!”
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
“Great is Thy faithfulness,” Lord, unto me!*

Summer and winter, and
springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

*“Great is Thy faithfulness!”
“Great is Thy faithfulness!”
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
“Great is Thy faithfulness,” Lord, unto me!*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence
to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and
bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

*“Great is Thy faithfulness!”
“Great is Thy faithfulness!”
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
“Great is Thy faithfulness,” Lord, unto me!*

As we come before God in prayer, let's make these words our own.

In times of uncertainty, we turn to you, O God
In times of trouble, we turn to you, O God
In times of despair, we turn to you, O God
And to renew our hope, we turn to you, O God

We thank you, Father, for your faithfulness to us
We thank you, Father, for your unfailing love
We thank you, Father, for your free forgiveness
We thank you, Father, that you have come to dwell with us

Almighty God, ruler of heaven and earth
You, who are above and beyond our wildest imaginings
Enlarge our thoughts, we pray
Renew our minds, we pray
Open our hearts, we pray
By the power of your Holy Spirit working in us

Amen

The Lord's prayer

Let's turn now to our Bibles and read:

I Corinthians chapter 12, verses 1-11

Song You may not know this song, but let the words become the prayer of your heart

Holy Spirit, rain down, rain down
Oh Comforter and Friend
How we need Your touch again
Holy Spirit, rain down, rain down

Let Your power fall
Let Your voice be heard
Come and change our hearts
As we stand on Your word
Holy Spirit, rain down

No eye has seen, no ear has heard
No mind can know what God has in store
So open up heaven, open it wide
Over Your church and over our lives

Reflection



What did you get for Christmas?

It's one of the questions we often ask children, and they are normally keen to tell us. But what did *you* get for Christmas? Anything special? Or was it the same old same old? Drearily predictable. Nothing out of the ordinary. Yet another box of assorted biscuits. Or a collection of 'smellies'.

God loves nothing more than to give good gifts to us, his children. So did he give you something for Christmas, or were heaven's shelves empty? Perhaps, like us, he had supply chain problems. Not enough celestial lorry drivers to make all those deliveries. Or perhaps he's been inundated with 'returns' from last year. Gifts he gave people, that were never used.

There are many things we can do in the Christian life simply by using our own skills and abilities. We can count the offertory, or fold newsletters. We can organise meetings and produce minutes of those meetings. We can ensure that we are all 'covid-safe.' But it's the things we cannot do on our own that are most important.

Spiritual things. Things that come from using 'gifts' that God gives us: 'gifts of the Spirit,' as Paul calls them. And it is only as we live 'in the Spirit,' that we can truly acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and express God's love in the way he desires.

Keen that the believers in Corinth should understand this, and not be 'uninformed', Paul sets it all out in the section of his first letter to them, that we have read today. And there are two things in particular that we need to understand.

The first is that Paul is talking here about 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit, not the 'fruit' of the Holy Spirit. 'Gifts' are given by God, through the work of the Holy Spirit. They are not earned. Nor can they be learned, as with other things in life. They are simply given. On the other hand, 'fruit' is what is produced in our lives, as a result of being connected to the vine, that is Jesus. Fruit grows: gifts are given.

The second thing is that there are many different gifts that are given to different people, by the Holy Spirit. We are not all given the same gifts, nor are we given all of the gifts. It is the Holy Spirit who chooses which gifts to give, and who to give them to. Take a look at the gifts Paul refers to:

- wisdom
- knowledge
- faith
- the gift of healing
- miraculous powers
- prophecy
- discernment
- different kinds of tongues, and
- the ability to interpret tongues

"All these, Paul says, are the work of one and the same Spirit", and are distributed "just as he determines." Or as *The Message* puts it, "He decides who gets what, and when." But importantly, all of the gifts are given "for the common good."

So as we reflect on the generosity shown to us by others at Christmas, let's also reflect on God's generosity in giving spiritual gifts, 'gifts of the Spirit.' It is these gifts that surpass all other gifts, in equipping us to do the will of God. And it will be during 2022, that we need more than ever, to see these gifts being put to proper use, in and through every believer. **Amen**

Song. Let's make this song a prayer to end with. Maybe we should sing it until God answers!

Spirit of the Living God
Fall fresh on me
Spirit of the Living God
Fall fresh on me
Melt me mold me
Fill me use me
Spirit of the Living God
Fall fresh on me

Blessing

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power that is at work within us,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations,
for ever and ever!

Amen (*Taken from Ephesians chapter 3*)