

# Keeping Our Vows in 2004

Psalm 61:1-8

*Halifax: 28 December 2003*

## **Introduction:**

Here we are at the beginning of another New Year.

- The New Year is a time when we often reflect on the past and make resolutions for the future.
  - Sadly, we often make resolutions that we don't follow through with.
  - But this morning I want to talk to you about a resolution that you **can** keep if you are truly in Jesus Christ.

The reason you can keep this resolution is because the keeping of it does not depend on you—

- You are not in it alone, but you are in it with Jesus Christ...

It is actually a resolution that you have already made if you are a Christian...

- It is the vow that you will worship God forever...
  - You made that vow when you became Christ's disciple.
  - Jesus Christ has come into the world to establish a kingdom in which people worship the Father in spirit and in truth.
  - He promises that He will gather all His sheep into His kingdom and make them into such worshippers.
- If you have heard His call and obeyed His call,
  - then you have been redeemed to become a true worshipper of God.
    - You have entered in a worshipping body that has Christ as its head.

To understand how Jesus does this, you have to learn to think corporately.

- You see, the only way you can come to God in an acceptable way is by coming to Him through Jesus Christ.
- You are called to die to sin and to walk in newness of life...
  - but the only reason your death and your new walk is acceptable to God is because Jesus has died and risen again for you.
  - Jesus is the head of the church, and what He did; He did for all the members.
    - When He went to the cross,

- you need to see that the whole church was being punished for sin—all our iniquity was laid on Him...
- The whole church was hanging on the cross in Jesus.
- And when He rose again from the dead,
  - the whole church was brought to new life—life that was acceptable to God!
- When Heaven received Him and He took His place at God’s right hand,
  - it was not just God’s acceptance of Him,
  - but of Him and all His members, the Church, which is His body.

Jesus is our Head!

- He is the one who brings the whole church from sin and misery into eternal fellowship in God’s house.
  - In God’s house, we delight in our God and worship Him forever and ever.
  - This morning I want to show you from Psalm 61 how Jesus leads us to this place as our Head.

**I. First, see that Jesus leads His church in crying out to God in her desperate need of Redemption.**

A. See the desperate cry in verse 1-4.

1. All through the Bible this cry of God’s people is heard...
  - a. You cry out when you see that you are far away from God.
    - 1) This is described in this psalm as being at the **ends of the earth**.
      - David felt He was at the ends of the earth when He was removed from the place where God revealed Himself...fleeing from Absalom...
      - Remember how Israel cried out in Egypt and God heard their cry?
      - Remember who they cried out many times in the time of the judges so that God delivered them from their oppressors?
        - He showed them their vanity and their need by bringing them oppressors to humble them.
    - 2) This crying comes when you realise that your sins have alienated you from God.
      - You realise that you do not have God in your life, that you are barren and without hope.
      - You realise that apart from Him, there is no lasting blessing.

- b. You cry out when you are **overwhelmed**.
    - That is, you see your weakness and helplessness...
    - Here are your sins, here is death...
      - You are desperate, there is nothing you can do...
      - There is nothing that anyone else can do...
      - Only God can help so you cry out to Him.
2. But it is Jesus our Head who leads us in this cry.
- a. It is His cry that initiates our cry...
    - 1) He understood our need much more than we do.
      - Remember the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane?
        - They kept going to sleep because they did not see their need.
        - Jesus, on the other hand, was crying out in agony and was overwhelmed because He had identified with our sin.
    - 2) He cried out for us because He made Himself one of us so that our guilt became His.
      - a) Remember what Moses did when the people had worshipped the golden calf?
        - God threatened to reject the people and raise up a new nations...
        - But Moses said, “I’m with them—if you destroy them, you will have to destroy me also.”
        - Moses was a type of Jesus Christ when he did that.
      - b) In Hebrews 5:7 we are told that He:
        - “offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,”
        - He felt the burden of our sin more than any of us ever did.
          - He understood the horror of it and the penalty for it.
    - 3) He taught you to cry out to God...
      - a) He teaches you to cry out to God by showing you your need
        - In the time of Moses, He gave us the law to show us our sin...
          - He brings its true meaning home to us to kill us so that we will turn to Him (like Paul in Romans 7)
        - He gave us the cross—
          - showing us what was required to atone for our sin...

- When we see God’s judgement on Him, it causes us to see how that judgement would have fallen on us!
- b) He teaches you to cry out to God by His example
- When you see Him crying out for your sins—to which you were insensible...
    - It wakes you up to start crying also!
    - Augustine’s heart was melted by his mother’s cries for his soul.
      - He saw how desperate she was and how concerned about his condition—
        - soon he realised that it was indeed desperate!
- b. Our cry is accepted only because it is joined to His cry (we ask in His name)
- He has gone before us to intercede and has been accepted...
  - When we come to God with our cry, we come with Him...
    - or rather, following Him to seek the mercy of God for ourselves that He has already secured.
  - Our cry reaches God for ourselves because His cry has already reached God for us.

TRANS> But what do we cry out to God when we come in this desperation?

B. The cry is given at the end of v. 2:

- “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”
1. This is your cry when your ship has capsized and nothing is left...
- It’s broken all to pieces and there is nothing to hang onto...
- a. You spy the rock across the way that is higher than you...
- But you cannot get to it...
    - And so you cry out:
      - “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”
      - “Bring me to that place of safety.”
- b. For Jesus as Head of the church, the rock of safety was the right hand of the Father.
- After His suffering and death, He was delivered from the grave and brought to sit at God’s right hand!

- He was given immortality and security...
  - His suffering was over, His reign had begun.
- c. For us, the rock that is higher is Jesus, seated as He is at God's right hand.
  - We are brought to the safety He has as Head over all things for the sake of the Church.
  - Now all things are brought into subjection to His glorious purposes!
    - There is perfect safety in Him!
    - Nothing can harm you.

TRANS> But this can be hard to believe in the middle of the battle!

2. Confidence is found by reflecting on God's faithfulness in the past. (v. 3)
  - v. 3: "For you have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy."
    - a. You can see how He kept Jesus safe until the appointed time.
      - 1) God the Father was a shelter (from the scorching sun or the powerful storm)
        - Jesus was blasted with temptations... but He went to God's word for shelter.
        - Jesus was pelted even by His own disciples who tried to dissuade him from the cross...
        - He faced the rejection of the people and foolishness of His own disciples...
          - Yet, God was a shelter to keep Him.
      - 2) The Father was a strong tower (from enemies)
        - All along, Jesus' enemies were trying to kill Him, but they could not until the appointed hour.
          - Herod tried to kill Him at birth...
          - the people of Nazareth tried to stone Him...
          - the Jewish leaders took counsel to put Him to death.
    - b. You can also should draw confidence from past experience,
      - both your personal experience.
        - 1) Look at the times He has rescued you when you would have gone astray!
          - When temptation was leading you to destruction,
            - and He sheltered you.

- 2) When the pressures of discipleship were about to make you give in to your enemies...
  - and He became your strong tower.

C. In verse 4, a vow is made in conjunction with this prayer for deliverance.

1. God's people often make vows in times of distress when they cry out to God and say,
  - "If you will deliver me, then I will praise you."
  - a. In verse 4, there are two vows that are made—
    - "I will abide in your tabernacle forever..."
    - "I will trust in the shelter of your wings..."
  - b. The idea is that if God will deliver me now,
    - then I will be His devoted disciple...
    - I will worship Him and I will trust Him.
2. This type of vow is very common in scripture:
  - a. Jacob made such a vow when he was overwhelmed with danger...
    - Gen. 28:20-22: Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."
    - This is a prayer of faith, accepted by God,
      - for God had promised these things to Jacob.
    - Notice that He promises in the vow to give a tenth of all he has...
      - This was to be used for the worship of God, that he might give thanks to His name.
  - b. Hannah made a similar vow when she was barren:
    - 1Sa 1:11: Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."
    - Notice that she also promises to worship God, giving the child Himself to serve God at the tabernacle.

TRANS> There are many other examples of vows that could be given...

3. But the vow that concerns us most is the One Jesus made when He was in His deepest distress.

a. This is found in Psalm 22.

1) Here we find Jesus suffering on the cross.

a) The psalm begins with those awful words:

- “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”
- Then He speaks of the anguish of his body and spirit.

b) And you know why He was in such a condition!

- He was suffering the penalty for His people’s sins!
- All our iniquities were laid on Him.

TRANS> But in verse 21, there is a great turning point

- He calls out in triumph: “You have answered Me!”
- Then He begins to reflect on that deliverance...

2) Then in verse 22 He makes the vow thanksgiving:

a) The vow has two parts:

1. “I will declare Your name to My brethren;”

- That is, He will tell His people what God has done!
- He will declare to them that God has accepted His sacrifice in their behalf—

TRANS> Then the second part is given...

2. “In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.”

- He will praise God for this deliverance.

b) Jesus makes this vow as the Head of the church...

- When a King or Head makes a vow to do something,
- He often uses His servants to carry out the task for Him...

1. When He promises to declare the good news of His acceptance to His brethren,

- He is promising to send out preachers to proclaim it...

2. And when He promises to praise God in the midst of the assembly,

- He is promising to appoint in all the churches that God is to be praised.
- You can see this in verse 23 where He commands...
  - Ps 22:23: “You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!
- And in verse 24 He explains that God is to be praised for accepting His sacrifice in the church’s behalf:
  - Ps 22:24: For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard.
  - By accepting His offering for sin, God has accepted the whole church!

3) In verse 25 He declares that He will keep this vow:

- He will see to it that His people keep the vow:
  - Ps 22:25: My praise shall be of you in the great assembly; I will pay my vows before those who fear Him...
  - And then He goes on to tell how rich and poor will worship God in spirit and truth from generation to generation!
  - This is equivalent to where Jesus says,
    - “My sheep will hear my voice and they will follow me.”
    - He guarantees that this praise of joyful thanks will go forth from the great assembly (or the Church).
    - He will see that this is done!

b. The vow in Psalm 61:4 is essentially the same.

- Psalm 61:4: I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.

1) First, there is the promise to abide in the tabernacle forever.

- The tabernacle is the place of worship...
  - It is the place where God’s people assemble and He reveals Himself to them.
  - To abide there forever is to praise God forever.
  - For us, it speaks of the assembled Church.
- This is the promise that Jesus made, and that we make with Him when we come to Him for salvation,

- that we will come and worship Him.
  - It is in the assembly that He reveals His mercy to us in the preaching of the word,
    - and it is here that we respond with thanksgiving.
- 2) Secondly, there is the promise of trusting in the shelter of His wings.
- This is a beautiful picture of intimacy and security...
    - The little chicks find refuge under the hen's wings.
    - Jesus has made God, who used to be our angry judge, a place of safety for us now!
  - It is our promise to cast our burdens on Him!
    - It is not for us to carry the load of sin...
    - It is not for us to foolishly strive to go our own way...
    - It is not for us to fret about what we will eat or what we will wear...
    - It is not ours to concern ourselves with what others think of us...
      - It is for us to trust—to come under the shelter of His wings.
  - It is the promise that I will entrust my whole life to Him!
    - I will not go my own way, but I will submit to His way.
- 3) But you might say, how can I ever keep such vows?
- a) Well remember...
    - It is not just your vow—it is Jesus' vow as the Head of the Church!
    - He will see to it that it is kept!
  - b) He will bring all His redeemed people into this relationship of worship and trust...
    - He will enable you to keep this vow.
    - He is able to help us because God has heard His prayer to deliver the church...

TRANS> And this is just where the Psalm goes...

## **II. See how God graciously responds to the church's prayer of desperation!**

A. Verse 5 declares,

- "You O God have heard my vows!"

1. There is Jesus, suffering on the cross...
  - There He is,
    - forsaken of God to the ends of the earth and overwhelmed in spirit...
  - There He is,
    - crying out fervently for the deliverance of His church from their sin and condemnation...
  - And then there are these wonderful words:
    - “You O God have heard my vows!”
  
2. And there we are ...
  - a. seeing that we are alienated by God because of our sins,
    - feeling His displeasure and trembling at the prospect of His judgement,
    - surrounded by our enemies and in bondage to death.
  - b. There we are, overwhelmed with no way to deliver ourselves,
    - crying out to God to deliver us...
    - And promising that we will serve Him if He will deliver us...
  - c. And then there are these wonderful words that we can say:
    - “You O God have heard my vows!”
    - You say this when you finally see what Jesus has done.
  
3. He hears and He acts...
  - so that we can go on to say with Jesus:
    - “You have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.”
  - a. For Jesus,
    - the heritage consists of the nations that God promised to Him for His suffering and death in their behalf...
    - As in Psalm 2:7-8:
      - "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You *are* My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give *You* The nations *for* Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
      - Jesus’ inheritance was a people as His own possession...
        - a redeemed people who would praise God.

- b. And for us who come to cry out to God with Jesus...
    - The inheritance or the heritage is the promise of everlasting life in Heaven with God!
      - We see that our sins are forgiven so that we are fully accepted by the Father!
      - We see that God has put a new heart and a new spirit within us so that we can repent and believe.
    - He unites us together as members of His body so that love begins to grow among us,
      - and He will cause it to continue to grow to perfection!
      - He will bring us into perfect peace.
- B. Our leader, King Jesus, is accepted into God's house forever, and we are accepted with Him...
1. Verse 6 and 7 declare it to be so!
    - Psalm 61:6-7: You will prolong the king's life, His years as many generations. He shall abide before God forever.
  - a. Brothers and sisters, this is not talking about King David (who wrote this Psalm)...
    - David only lived out a normal span,
      - but this is talking about the One who lives forever as King...
      - This is talking about King Jesus!
    - Unlike the kings and priests of the Old Testament,
      - He has an unchangeable office because He ever lives to rule us and to make intercession for us.
      - Of the increase of His government and of peace, there will be no end.
  - b. This eternal life is not the eternal life He shares with the Father from all eternity...
    - This is that eternal life He obtained as mediator after He was joined to His sinful people.
      - Of course He would live forever if He were independent of us...
        - But what about after He had become the head of us—as sinful and corrupt people who had turned away from God!

- Because of that new relation to us that He entered into when He came to earth, He was now subject to judgement and condemnation.
  - But here it says that He will live forever as King!
    - He is accepted by the Father even though all our sins were laid on Him...
    - He is accepted even though He has joined Himself as one with us...
      - so that if we perish, He also perishes;
      - and if He lives, we also live.
    - And so He said to us after He was raised:
      - “Because I live, you shall live also!”
2. And King Jesus is pictured as having two attendants that assure us that He will be preserved as King forever...
- These attendants are mercy and truth!
    - a. This pair is found throughout the Bible,
      - always to give us fresh assurance to us as God’s people...
        - to let us know how secure we are.
        - In Micah 7:20 it says:
          - “You will give truth to Jacob *And* mercy to Abraham, Which You have sworn to our fathers From days of old.”
          - Jesus is the one who has brought God’s mercy and truth near to us in His righteous kingdom.
      - b. In His gospel, John declares that:
        - John 1:17: For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
    - 1) The idea is that Moses **showed** us what was required of us...
      - He showed us in commandments and He showed us in ceremonies...
        - He said,
          - “This is how you must live before God”
          - “This is what you must do because of your sin... there must be a substitute without spot to die in your place.”

- If God had not previously promised to provide salvation for His people, they could not have tolerated Moses!
- But He had promised that in Abraham's seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

TRANS> So the idea is that Moses **showed** us what was required of us...

2) But Jesus Christ **did** what was required of us.

- He brought grace (or mercy) and truth so that all God's promises could come to us.

c. You disciples of Jesus, you are so secure in Jesus Christ!

- His Kingdom is secured by divine mercy and truth!

1) **Mercy** is **Hesed** which speaks of covenant love—

- that love that God swore to give to us...
  - that love that accepts us on the same basis that Christ Himself is accepted!
- Jesus has so identified with us that our acceptance is bound up as one with His acceptance...
  - We who believe are accepted into God's family even as He is accepted—
    - We are accepted in the beloved!

2) **Truth** is God's Amen—

- It speaks of the fact that Jesus did in reality what was only done ceremonially before...
- He was the true priest that appeared in Heaven for us...
  - He appeared in the true tabernacle with the only true sacrifice that takes away our sin.
    - He offered His very own blood to atone for our sins.
- This is the real atonement...
  - It cannot fail to secure the forgiveness of sin for every believer.
  - What Moses did in shadow, Jesus has done in truth!

3) Divine mercy and truth!

- This is the pair that guards the reign of King Jesus!
- Christian, take heart!

- This is what makes Christ's kingdom absolutely unshakeable so that even if the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea, you need not fear!
- We have a kingdom which cannot be shaken!

TRANS> And so you see what a great salvation the Church of Jesus Christ has!

- Our great King and Shepherd has gone before us...
  - He has cried out to God for our salvation—
    - Our cries are an echo of His great cry...
  - He has vowed to God that when His people are delivered, His church will worship God,
    - and our vow is an echo of His vow...
  - And God has heard His prayer...
    - And because He has heard Him, He has heard us who cry out in His name.

**So what does this all mean for you?**

**III. It means that you are now called and enabled to perform the vow of thanksgiving!**

A. Jesus speaks for the whole church when He says:

- “So I will sing praise to Your name forever that I may daily perform my vows.”
1. This is not just His vow, it is our vow because we are delivered with Him...
    - As soon as we are joined to Him by faith,
      - we enter into all the privileges of salvation...
      - Our sins are forgiven, we are adopted as God's children, we are renewed in the image of Christ...
  2. In gratitude it is for us to sing praise to His name forever that we may perform our vows.
    - It is the only fitting response of gratitude to God for so great a salvation...
      - When our sin had separated us from Him and we were completely overwhelmed...
      - He has heard the cry of our King!
      - He has heard your cry in Jesus' name and delivered you!

B. What can you do but praise His name forever?

1. Jesus has promised this of us!
  - a. He has promised that His sheep will hear His call and that they will worship God.
  - b. He will see to it that this is done if you belong to Him...
    - He will not let you go on in your rebellion.
    - You can keep the vow in His strength!
2. And so I call you this day to arise and worship your God for this glorious salvation!
  - a. If you know this salvation, there is no place for half-hearted worship!
    - There is no place for sluggishness in praise...
    - No call for spotty, irreverent prayer...
    - No excuse for careless hearing of God's word...
    - No warrant for harbouring bitterness toward your neighbour...
    - Instead, "I will sing praise to you forever that I may daily perform my vows."
  - b. Let us come gladly to His house to sing praise to His name,
    - to listen eagerly and gratefully to the gospel...
    - to pray with fervent sincerity
    - and to live with glad submission day after day...
      - Praising Him in secret worship...
      - Praising Him in family worship...
      - Praising Him in public worship.
  - c. This is a New Years resolution that you can keep...
    - because King Jesus has gone before you and made the way...
    - He has vowed that all those who trust in Him will do these things, and they will...
      - He will see to it.
      - "So I will sing praise to Your name forever that I may daily perform my vows."