

# I Hamilton, the interview with P Levy, 20210718 evening service

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] It's really great to have Ian and Joan with us. I'm going to ask Ian to come to the front and interview him a little bit. But we want to thank you, Joan, for coming up. Ian, come on up and we'll interview you and chat a little bit before we pray.

It's great to have you with us. It's a pleasure to be here. That should work, shouldn't it? Good. And what have you been doing since we last saw you?

Was it 19 months ago, 18 months ago? Oh, this and that. Bits and pieces. I've been teaching a little online, preaching most Sundays.

Writing a little. Going to every coffee house near and far with Joan, which is one of the delights of not having the care of a congregation.

So I've been kept, in God's kindness, very, very busy. Yeah. People are always asking me, what are the lessons of lockdown? What has the church learned?

[ 1 : 07 ] And I don't really know. And so you're older and wiser, just. And what would you say the lessons that the church had learned over the past 18 months, having faced the pandemic?

Well, I don't know who has known the mind of the Lord. I'm not sure we know as yet what we have been intended to learn.

I tend to think that the Lord and his sovereign, wise, merciful, gracious purpose has ordained this unsettling time to humble the church, to remind us to not put our trust in princes, however great and godly they may be.

I think these days will make the church a little leaner, but perhaps in God's kindness a little purer.

Above all, I think that these times are a reminder to us that the Lord God omnipotent reigns, that our great need as a church and as the universal church is to be humbled before God and to realize that the wisdom of God's word is transgenerational.

We will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. Now, that takes many forms. And I don't mean we shouldn't be thoughtful and have plans and outreaches and missions.

[ 2 : 58 ] I don't mean that at all. But that we need to remember that what God has placed at the very heart of the life of his church is what he is most pleased to bless.

And when we give ourselves to those core, vital realities of prayer and the ministry of the word. And I've often wondered, is there significance that prayer comes before the ministry of the word?

If you read the first four chapters of Acts, again and again and again and again, I think five or six times, look placards the centrality of prayer.

Corporate, congregational, and I think non-sabbatarian prayer at the heart of the church's life. So, if anything, I hope we might learn.

Don't put your trust in princes. Recalibrate your life. Remember that the Lord reigns. And let us express that conviction in prayer and in the transgenerational proclamation of God's word.

[ 4 : 08 ] That's a great answer. If I was, if somebody was going to, I thought we had a heckler, but it's just one of my eldest phones. That's all right. And if we were going to, people are going to talk about recalibrating their life.

Expand a little bit on that, on what advice you would give in recalibrating someone's life. I try never to give advice. That might seem a little odd for someone who's been a pastor for 41 years.

I say to people what every day I think I say to myself. Ian, never forget what you were and what by God's grace you now are.

And that might seem very basic and very simple, but I think we can so easily forget that we were without hope and without God. We were children of God's wrath like the rest of mankind.

We were on a broad road that would lead us to everlasting destruction. We were sunk in utter ignorance. But now by God's grace, we are united to his Son.

[ 5 : 25 ] We are heirs together with him of the glory of God. We can call the everlasting God our Father. And I know for me, my great need is to ask the Lord to help me never to allow those truths to become commonplace.

But that every day I might rise with a fresh sense of the utter wonder that I am what I am by the grace of God.

I don't think the Christian life is rocket science. I really don't. I don't mean it's easy. It can be demanding. It can be costly beyond anything I've ever known.

But the Christian life is living before God. I love the little phrase, koram deo, before the face of God, marveling that he is your God and the God of your children.

So, recalibration is about just allowing the foundational truths of the gospel to reshape our lives every day.

[ 6 : 39 ] And never take for granted that you're in a faithful gospel church. Better churches in this have died because people have drifted.

Think of Revelation 2, 1 through 7. Better churches in this have died because they've drifted from their first love.

That's very odd. You kind of stepped back from being a pastor to moving to kind of theological education. But you were 40 odd years, isn't it, as a church minister?

I'm not that. 37. 37. Don't make me older than I am or I feel. So, as you look back over that period of time, without the danger of kind of nostalgia, what are some of the weaknesses that you see amongst churches?

Because you did travel quite a lot and you've got quite a wide circle. What would be some of the areas where you think we as today's church, we just need to be aware that that might be a weakness?

[ 7 : 40 ] Oh, dear. I think, and again, I can only speak for myself.

I start with myself. When I'm preaching, I preach to myself before I preach to anyone else. Because I know that I need to hear what God's word is to say more than anyone else.

I think in our circles, our tradition, the Reformed evangelical tradition, the biggest danger is that we slowly but surely become like the Pharisee in Luke 18.

I thank you, Lord, that I'm not like other men. We become complacent. We think ourselves to be something when we're not. We compare ourselves to others.

You know, Oscar Wilde didn't get much right, but comparisons are odious. I think there's a tremendous danger within the Reformed tradition if you look at history, that slowly but surely we think ourselves a cut above the rest and we forget.

[ 8 : 48 ] We are what we are by the grace of God. What do we have that we did not receive? And the inexorable, insidious influence of spiritual Reformed complacency just kills a church.

It kills a church. So, that's been my struggle over the years. To remind myself every day that I might be a fully paid up member of the Westminster Confession Club, and I suppose I am.

But my Christian life is to, first and foremost, front and center, be on the Lord Jesus, His cross.

And so, when I come across anyone who's from anywhere, and the Savior is their only hope, then increasingly I'm disinclined to ask them at any time, are you Reformed?

I just want to say, are you loving the Savior? And that's where our fundamental identity lies.

[ 10 : 05 ] Now, I can say that because I'm a passionate, covenantal, Presbyterian, Calvinist to the core of my being. But when I read John Calvin, especially, I read Gospel Catholicity.

So, the danger of thinking ourselves to be better than we are, more than we are, is something we need to be on guard against. Thank you very much. That's very helpful. Good.