

# Sunday AM Service ~ September 10, 2023

## Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

### Welcome & Prayer

*"LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.*

*<sup>2</sup>Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. <sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? <sup>5</sup>You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour. <sup>6</sup>You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: <sup>7</sup>all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, <sup>8</sup>the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. <sup>9</sup>LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"*

Let's pray. Dear Lord Almighty, how majestic is your name in all the earth. This day we wish the whole world would recognise your name, would recognise your power and grace and justice and mercy. We admit that we don't always remember how great you are. We don't always live in line with your holiness. We don't always rely upon your power. We don't always listen to your Word. So please forgive us. And place your Holy Spirit within us so that today we might worship you with heart, soul mind and body. We might be renewed in our faith. That we might desire to humble ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus each day. Be with us today and especially throughout this service, for we need you today more than ever. And we ask these things in Jesus' name Amen.

### Song – Almighty Maker - <https://youtu.be/jbytk5BeQU4>

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|--|---|
| <p>1. Who but the Lord set the bound'ries of light<br/>Hung the stars in the night?<br/>Who but the Lord drew the face on the moon<br/>Made the planets to move?<br/>Who but the Lord tells the clouds<br/>When to pour. Thunder to roar?<br/>Amazing are Your works</p> | <p>2. Who but the Lord could have dreamed of the plan<br/>That would save fallen man?<br/>Who but the Lord washes rebels with blood<br/>Making mercy a flood?<br/>Who but the Lord could give life through a cross<br/>Rescuing us?<br/>Amazing are Your ways</p> |
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Chorus

Almighty Maker

You command heaven and earth

By the power of Your Word

Be praised forever

Almighty Maker

All creation sings of You

Glory fills all that You do

Be praised forever, ever, evermore

Chorus

Bridge

All things are from You

All things are through You

O God, the great I AM

All things are for You

All things are to You

O God, the great I AM

### Bible Reading – Song of Songs 5:2 – 6:10 (NIV)

**Friends** <sup>5</sup>Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?

**She** *Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labour gave you birth. <sup>6</sup>Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.<sup>[b]</sup> (Or fire, / like the very flame of the LORD) <sup>7</sup>Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it<sup>[c]</sup> would be utterly scorned.*

**Friends** <sup>8</sup> *We have a little sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?* <sup>9</sup> *If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar.*

**She** <sup>10</sup> *I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment.* <sup>11</sup> *Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver.* <sup>12</sup> *But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit.*

**He** <sup>13</sup> *You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice!*

**She** <sup>14</sup> *Come away, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains.*

## Announcements 10/9/23

**Focus for the month – Equipping.** Why should we be better equipped for the works that God is calling us to do? It is because part of our faith in God is a trust and following of his son so that his ways become our ways, his passion becomes our passion, his goals become our goals. And what is Jesus passionate about? His people! Growing and producing spiritual fruit in His people. And that growth and fruit comes through God's people using their spiritual gifts. So, this month we are honing in on what spiritual gifts do you have and how are you seeking to grow those gifts in service of our Saviour?

**TODAY** we will be having a congregational meeting at 11:15am at Charlestown Church to discuss our ongoing involvement with the Hamilton Church and what the employment of David Robertson to that Church might mean for us going forward. If you want more information, please see the email sent to all on our Elvanto Church Management System last weekend. We will also be discussing the elder's recommendation to employ Marissa Brunton as our Kids Worker. Please join us for these important discussions.

**100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> November.** There will be a planning meeting for our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary today after this morning's congregational meeting.

**Steve's leave.** Stephen will be leading a spiritual retreat this week from Sunday night until Thursday. Please pray for all the ministers involved. From Saturday he will be taking 6 weeks LSL during which the family will be travelling to USA/Canada for around a month. Please pray for a good time of rest and refreshment. If you need any pastoral help until the end of October, please see Jon or Mal or Jo.

**Men's Event.** For fire and fellowship at Rob Hearn's house, From 7.30pm on Saturday the 23rd of Sept. Bring supper item or drink to share. Let Rob know prior to the night if you intend to attend 0490 320 813

**Women's Event | Saturday 16th September 2-4pm.** Join us for afternoon tea and encouragement together with our sisters at Swansea Presbyterian Church, 20 Macquarie Street, Swansea. RSVP by TODAY September to Terry on 0402143776, Helen on 0400309533, Jannah on 0490956147 or Bev on 0409571141 for catering purposes.

**Samaritan's Purse Christmas Boxes.** Boxes will be available from today for this campaign for \$1 per box. Fill your box and include \$12.50 for postage, have a box filled on your behalf for \$25, or buy a starter pack for \$8.50 and add a toy and article of clothing and \$12.50 for postage. Please speak to Kathryn O if you have any questions.

**Meals on Wheels Charlestown** - volunteers needed. If you have some time on your hands and would love to help out in the community Meals on Wheels may be the answer! They are needing help in the kitchen preparing the meals. Also delivering the meals, both drivers and support. For further information please speak to Ron Bell or Helen Flett. Or contact the Meals on Wheels office at 21 James Street, Charlestown on 4943 5146 and speak to Cathy or Jenny.

## Pastoral Prayer Points

### Song –And can it be - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQelGbKqiw8>

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|---|--|
| <p>1. And can it be that I should gain<br/>An int'rest in the Savior's blood?<br/>Died He for me, who caused His pain—<br/>For me, who Him to death pursued?<br/>Amazing love! How can it be,<br/>That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?</p> <p><i>Refrain:</i><br/>Amazing love! How can it be,<br/>That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?</p> | <p>4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay,<br/>Fast bound in sin and nature's night;<br/>Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—<br/>I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;<br/>My chains fell off, my heart was free,<br/>I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.</p> |
| <p>2. 'Tis myst'ry all: th' Immortal dies:<br/>Who can explore His strange design?<br/>In vain the firstborn seraph tries<br/>To sound the depths of love divine.<br/>'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,<br/>Let angel minds inquire no more.</p>   | <p>5. No condemnation now I dread;<br/>Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;<br/>Alive in Him, my living Head,<br/>And clothed in righteousness divine,<br/>Bold I approach th' eternal throne,<br/>And claim the crown, through Christ my own.</p>                |
| <p>3. He left His Father's throne above—<br/>So free, so infinite His grace—<br/>Emptied Himself of all but love,<br/>And bled for Adam's helpless race:<br/>'Tis mercy all, immense and free,<br/>For, O my God, it found out me!</p>  |  |

### Sermon: Love as strong as death – (Stephen Taylor)

I know what it is like to think you have met 'the one'. There is so much about her that confirms in your mind that she is it. She is smart, funny, attractive and best of all a committed Christian. You can talk for hours and discover you have so much in common. You quickly become smitten, plan the future in your mind. You are quite simply 'in love.'

I also know what it is like when that person you are in love with says, 'Stephen we need to talk.' After a statement like that you all of a sudden know your world is about to fall apart.

I know what it is like to hope she is going to change her mind, to come to her senses and continue with this dream that you have in your head. But no, the dream remains a nightmare. I know what it is like to nurse a broken heart and how long it can take to repair.

Slide 2

Before I really did find 'the one' I had my heart broken a couple of times and I now know that I actually wasn't in love at all. But I didn't know that at the time. When it happened to me, one time there was a song on the radio at the time by Foreigner, entitled 'I want to know what love is'. And that's a good question, a great question. What is love?

Well at the end of Song of Songs, Solomon will tell us what love is. After 8 chapters of looking and learning from this young couple, we finally get to step back from the action. And reflect on love. Not just their love.

But love itself. And yes, like a finale of a symphony some of the themes have already been presented to us before. But here this wise man Solomon draws all the threads together and give us his summation of love. What is love? Love is like a precious jewel with many facets. For firstly

Slide 3

### 1. Love is Personal

**Friends** <sup>5</sup>*“Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?”* In the last stanza of this song of songs it is the friends who speak first. In chapter 3:7 they asked the same question, who is this coming up from the desert? And we saw it was Solomon, the King about to be married to his Queen on their wedding day. This time it is not Solomon coming up from the desert it is the couple themselves.

Two lovers. Leaving the desert, leaving the hard times, leaving the harsh places. Leaving all their times of wandering behind on their way to the promised land, like Israel in the book of Exodus. And they are leaning on each other. They are depending upon each other. They are connected to each other. They are coming home. And she says to her husband

**She** *“Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labour gave you birth”*. They are reminiscing. They are talking together about their back story. That was where we first met. Over there is your family home, where you grew up. There was the hospital that you were born in.

Occasionally we travel to Sydney as a family and we drive through the inner west and I do the same thing with the kids. That was the hospital I was born in Auburn hospital. That was where I first lived a fibro house in Lidcombe. That was the soccer oval I played soccer in the Under 7's. And the kids roll their eyes. “You have told us that all before Dad”.

Slide 4

But we see here how personal love is. Each couple have their own history, their own shared experiences. That makes love richer, deeper, more meaningful. You see love grows with time, if you are willing to lean on each other. If you are willing to travel through the desert places together. At the climax of our book about love we don't see a torrid sex scene as if that it is the highlight of love, we see a couple arm in arm, walking home together. For

Slide 5

### 2. Love is Personal & Protective (verse 6a)

<sup>6</sup>*“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave”*.

The woman wants to seal off the man's heart. She wants to be the only one who gets truly intimate with her lover. But she wants also to seal his arm. She wants everyone to know that this guy is mine and mine alone. She wants to seal him completely off. Just as on the bottom of a genuine piece of Royal Daulton they stamp the piece with a seal that declares this is the genuine article so she wants him to be stamped, tattooed maybe or at least a ring on his finger that says, he is mine. Forever.

Slide 6

Because love is as strong as death. Nothing can stop death. Nothing can get in death's way. Nothing can nullify it. Nothing can delay it or cancel it. And love should be like that. She's saying, our love is as strong as that. It's irresistible. It's irrevocable. It's permanent. Its' even stronger than the grave.

Which is why we keep looking for that sort of love, for a love stronger than death. For true love, real love can withstand the strongest of foes – sickness, poverty, abandonment, unfaithfulness, even death itself, a death of children or parents or even the death of your marriage partner themselves. Death holds its victims in its grip and never lets them go. In the same way once smitten by love it's all one way and irreversible. You are defenceless. You are under its permanent bond & thirdly

### 3. Love is Passionate (verse 6b-7)

*"It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. <sup>7</sup> Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned".*

Fire is such a powerful force. Remember the bushfires that raged around our country a while back? Despite their best-efforts firefighters just couldn't put many of them out. They had planes water bombing them, they had volunteers back burning before them. They had hoses and fire trucks, they threw everything but the kitchen sink at those fires and yes, some houses were saved but it didn't stop the fire, only rain weeks after did that.

Slide 8

That's what love is like. It is a mighty fire. Waters can't douse it. Rivers cannot sweep it away. And money cannot buy it in the first place or lead people out of his grip in the final consideration. It's too passionate. It's too strong. It just can't be bought.

Sex can be bought. Loyalty can be bought. Companionship can be bought. But true love cannot be bought or traded for anything. In 1993 a movie came out called Indecent Proposal. Where a stranger offered a young couple a million dollars for the wife to spend the night with him. It's a great movie and if you haven't watched it, I won't tell you any more than to say, in the end love wins.

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For love is the pearl of great price. It is worth more than money can buy. It is fire that once started cannot be put out. In the words of Bruce Lee, the kung fu actor, *"Love is like a friendship caught on fire. In the beginning a flame, very pretty, often hot and fierce, but still only light and flickering. As love grows older, our hearts mature and our love becomes as coals, deep-burning and unquenchable."*

Slide 10

But hidden in the text is an even deeper meaning. Because if you look at the NIV it says *"Love 'burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame'"* And you will notice that it has a footnote and down the bottom it says, *"Or like the very flame of the Lord"*. The word for mighty is Yah which can mean mighty or more likely is short for Yahweh, the Lord God, the mighty one. Which other translations go for and I think is the right translation in this case.

This love gives us a taste of God himself. Finally, after 8 chapters of this OT book God breaks into the discussion. Right at the very end when the writer has stepped back and looked at love itself, God finally has his say. Love is like a flame from God Himself. Actually, the New Testament will go on to say that God is love.

Slide 11

It says if you want to describe God, if you want to get to the very essence of God, if you want to cut God apart and see what makes Him bleed, he would bleed Love. He is full of love. God is love. And that truth leads us down a whole new path. Just think about it.

God's love is personal. In Ephesians 1 we read that God chose you before the creation of the world to be holy & blameless. God chose me. I didn't choose him. I was running away from God. But God loves me so much that he chose me before the creation of the world, before I even existed. That's how great God's love is. He chooses me and then He sealed me.

Slide 12

Again, in Ephesians 1 we read that *"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory"*.

There was no way God was allowing us to get away. He places his love on us and he sends his Holy Spirit to **seal our inheritance away**. To seal his love within our lives. To seal our eternal destiny with him. That's real love, isn't it? That's what God's love is to us.

And that love is as strong as death. God's people all deserve the penalty of death for the sins they have committed while alive. But God's love is stronger than that penalty. God's love is able to overcome that penalty. For God sent his one and only son to die so that we might live. God raised his son out of death so that we might have eternal life. God defeated death, death itself has died so that God's love might triumph. So that God's love can be with us forever.

Slide 13

Listen to these words that God says to his chosen one Israel, words that he would be happy to repeat to his chosen ones today, *"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.*

*<sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

*<sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD your God"*

Do you get that? This love that we have been looking at in the Song of Songs is just a dress rehearsal for the greatest love story of all. Where Jesus marries his bride the Church & shares his love with her. His personal love, His protective love, His passionate love & if that is true then there is even more to love than this. So, we now turn to the fact that

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#### **4. Love is Pure (verse 8-9)**

For we now get these verses that seem out of place but when you think about it, they are not out of place at all. If we want this sort of love in marriage, if we want this sort of love in eternity, it is not open to anyone, but only those who are pure.

So, the friends or probably more likely the brothers of the bride say, <sup>8</sup>*"We have a little sister and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?"* How do we keep her pure, ready for this sort of personal, protective, passionate love?

And they then answer their own question. <sup>9</sup>*"If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her"*. If she is like a wall and resists men and if she has built up her fortress to make sure her treasures are not plundered, we will support her. We will spend big on silver towers to stop any incoming invasion. But *"If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar"*. If she is a door and she is open to men, we will do our very best to protect her.

You see the family have a responsibility to their young women & their young men to help keep them pure. To support them when they first start getting interested in the opposite sex & to protect them when the desire and infatuation and even when the first heart flutters of love begin. We want them all to be virgins when they marry so they can experience all that love has to offer them.

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#### **5. Love is peaceful (verse 10)**

And the woman says, that was fine when I was younger but one day, I took on the responsibility myself to remain a virgin. She says <sup>10</sup>*"I am a wall & my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment"*. She says, when I got old enough, I decided that I would be a wall. I resolved to keep myself pure. I worked hard so I wasn't placed in an uncompromising position. I didn't find myself in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong guy & because I kept myself pure, because I remained a virgin, I can bring something special, something extra to marriage. To my husband. Contentment.

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Actually, the word is Shalom. Peace. Completeness. Fulfilment. Wholeness. And it is interesting that Shalom is from the same Hebrew word as Solomon. And the same Hebrew word that is used of the woman in chapter 6:13 Shulammite. Shalom, contentment is found when the Solomon's of this world meet the Shulammite's and find together God's love.

When true love comes in the course of marriage, there is a sense of peace. There is a sense of "this is how it ought to be." There is a sense of fulfilment. You know that God has brought you together. "It was worth the wait," she says to her husband. "It was worth the sacrifice" he says to his wife. Because the image here is not just one side of the marriage couple keeping themselves pure but both of them. What's good for the goose is definitely good for the gander. By keeping themselves pure, by remaining virgins their holiness brings happiness to each other. Their purity brings each other peace.

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But is this true? Does it really make a difference? Well survey after survey find that highly religious people have the most satisfying sex lives. Yet another survey that came out in 2019 done by the Institute of Family Studies, based on 9,566 interviews in 11 countries found that *"There is a strong association between shared regular participation in a religious community and both relationship quality and sexual satisfaction"*

Summarising their findings in the *New York Times*: "... **it turns out that the happiest of all wives in America are religious conservatives**". David French of the *National Review* notes *"the sexual revolution can often bring its own brand of unhappiness, including — ironically enough — sexlessness."* Who would have thought that religious people have the best sex?

Now that is not saying these couples were all virgins when they married. But it is saying that God's ways bring the most satisfaction. The most fulfilment. The most peace. And when we go to the last book in the Bible, we see all is ready for the wedding supper of Jesus & we see the bride, the Church arrive pure, in white. You see God is the one who can make the dirty clean, the impure, pure. Jesus washes our sins away with the blood of the cross.

Jesus has kept himself pure **for us**. And he can make us pure through the forgiveness of our sins. And that purity will lead us to peace, peace with God. Peace within ourselves. Peace with others. Even if in the past we didn't keep ourselves pure. Even if in the past we were more of a door than a wall and had been sexually intimate with others then go to Jesus, ask for his forgiveness and he can wash you clean. He can still give you the peace, the fulfilment, the completeness, you desire in marriage and we should all desire in the whole of our lives.

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#### **6. And this sort of love is priceless (verses 11-12)**

<sup>11</sup>"Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. <sup>12</sup>But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit".

Once again Solomon is brought into our song. He might have had a thousand wives and mistresses but that meant he couldn't manage them all himself. He had to put others in charge of his harem and his houses. He might have seemed to have everything he wanted. But the woman says to her husband, you have something better than a thousand women, you have me. All to yourself. My vineyard, my body is only for you. And I give it to you. Exclusively.

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And friends that is a priceless gift. A gift that money can't buy. Not just the woman's body. Not just the man's body but their love. Not just the physical, the emotional & the spiritual. The whole package. And that is priceless. That is enough to truly satisfy. Solomon can keep his money, his fame, his harem, his many loves. This husband will be as happy and fulfilled. All that & much more.

## 7. For finally, this love is permanent (verse 13-4)

For in the final two verses, we hear both the man and women speak and fittingly the woman gets the final say. The man says <sup>13</sup>“*You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance let me hear your voice!*” He gets to talk with his wife and listen to her as the happy couple walk into the sunset. And she ends the book by saying <sup>14</sup>“*Come away, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains.*” He gets to enjoy the pleasures of being with her from now on.

And that’s how it ends. They are together. They end the book together. And funnily enough that is where the whole Bible also ends. For in Revelation 21 we see the bride, the church being married to their groom, their Lord Jesus. And right at the end of the last chapter in the Bible in Revelation chapter 22 we hear echoes of Song of Songs 8.

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<sup>17</sup>“*The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.*” <sup>20</sup>“*He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*”

The invitation is not just for the married people to come, but all to come. Singles to come. Divorced to come. Unhappily married people can come. And married people can come. To experience love, real love, true love because God is love. To experience God’s priceless love, his permanent love, his peaceful love, his pure love, his passionate love, his protective love & his personal love. Come don’t miss out. This is the love of your life. The greatest love of all

Do you want to know what love is? God is love. And the New Testament takes this love and in the wonderful 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians tell us even more about what love is. And I am going to read it to you but not only am I going to read you the words I am going to express for us where we find this sort of love. Let’s listen to Paul words slightly changed.

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<sup>4</sup>“*Jesus’ love is patient, Jesus’ love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*” <sup>5</sup>“*It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*” <sup>6</sup>“*Jesus love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*” <sup>7</sup>“*Jesus love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*”

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Now that is a love story, I want to be a part of. And so, the call is for all of us to Come, Come to Jesus. Let the one who is thirsty come, come to him. So, are you thirsty for love, this sort of love? Then reply back to this wonderful offer “Yes I will come.” But please “Come, Lord Jesus come!” Come now so that we can enjoy this love forever. For some are fortunate to find love in this world but many aren’t. But Jesus offers us his perfect love for all eternity. And no-one, no-one should miss out on the greatest love of all.



## Song – Hymn of the Ages - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBBSQDRInQ4>

1. All history shall bow before Your throne  
Time and space on bended knee shall come  
Though kingdoms pass away, Your majesty remains  
How great You are, how great must be Your song
  
2. The Alpha and Omega without end  
The everlasting makes this wretch His friend  
The angels stand in awe, this beggar heart responds  
How great You are, how great must be Your song

Chorus: You're the hymn of the ages  
The hope of all the world  
You carried our redemption on Your shoulders  
You're the anthem of salvation  
Jesus, Lord of Lords  
Your legacy will echo through the ages

3. Oh, for a countless choir in my lungs  
To sing Your praises with a thousand tongues  
The purpose in my days, is ever to proclaim  
How great You are, and how great must be Your song

Chorus

Bridge: We raise the never-ending song  
The greatest song we've ever known  
The song of angels, the hymn of ages  
Holy is the Lord (Repeat bridge)

Chorus

**Benediction** “*Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like the very flame of the LORD.*”