

10am HC Sunday 12 July 2026

Isaiah 55:10-13, Romans 8:1-11, Matt 13:1-9, 18-23 – *The people of God know that Christ is for us and Christ is in us*

If you've been watching the FIFA World Cup you will know that part of the ritual before the start of every match is to hear the national anthems of the two countries' teams playing the match. For me, one of the incidental pleasures of the preparations for the world cup was to listen to Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook on *The Rest is History* podcast exploring the stories behind the national anthems of 6 of the countries represented at the World Cup.

Ideally, a country's national anthem will describe what unites the people of that country. The best anthems encapsulate what is special about them. The anthem might identify somebody who's been pivotal in the narrative; perhaps a person who fought for the people; somebody who'd united them.

The perfect national anthem will give a sense of the promises that the people are holding onto; and it will give a flavour of their shared history. It will offer an answer to what they think it is worth living for; what they want to commit themselves to; and what they look forward to.

In Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of his letter to the church in Rome, the apostle Paul writes about the grace of God: the love of God seen in and through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Paul writes about the difference that the grace of God makes to the people who put their trust in Christ. In today's reading we heard Paul making the connections between Jesus' death and resurrection, and the life in the Spirit that can be ours if we can change our mindset, and join in with the people of God.

And as we hear Paul describing the change that has been brought about for the people of God – by and through Jesus' death on the cross, and the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit) – we hear a national anthem for the people of God. As we heard in our reading, Paul first of all tells us what it means to know that Christ is **for** us, and then Paul tells us the difference that it makes to know that Christ is **in** us, through the Holy Spirit.

Let's look first at what Paul says about **what Christ has done for us**. In v3, Paul says ***God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.*** Meaning that in Jesus, the Son of God actually became human, and wasn't just pretending to be human. And meaning also that in Jesus, the Son of God was actually sinless.

And whilst you're there, in v3, if you've ever felt uncomfortable about the idea of a father condemning his son to death, notice that Paul doesn't say "*God condemned Jesus*", but rather says that God ***"condemned sin in the flesh [of his son]"***. And remember that in Gethsemane, before going to the cross, Jesus was willing to say to his Father ***"not what I want but what you want"***.

The anthem of the people of God doesn't sing the praises of a king or of a general, or of a revolutionary; somebody who might fall out of favour at the next change of regime, and who within a generation or two might almost be forgotten. The people of God praise the one who, in the words of v11, ***raised Christ from the dead [and] will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.***

But this is not all that Christ has done for us. Christ's death not only justified us, setting us ***free from the law of sin and of death***. Christ's death also meant that ***the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us***.

God doesn't just want us to be free from the condemnation that our self-centred natures deserve; he wants his moral law to be fulfilled by his people. And we're able to do this, because by the Spirit, we are united with Christ and begin to walk, ***not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit***. Our obedience to the law of God – the law that was summarised by Jesus in the requirement to love God and love our neighbour – is both a necessary and a positive aspect of being a Christian. Our obedience to God's law is made possible by virtue of us having life in the Spirit.

Our reading reminds us that an anthem for the people of God would not just be about what Christ has done *for* us, but would also tell us about **what Christ has done in us**.

It would describe how the people of God live a life in union with Christ, walking by the Spirit. And what does that mean? We can see in v5, 6 and 7 that it means that they ***set their minds on the things of the Spirit, not the things of the flesh***. As the people of God we think in the way that we do *because of who we are*. Being the people of God determines what preoccupies us and the ambitions that drive us; affecting how we spend our time and our energies; and what we prioritise.

But setting our minds on the things of the Spirit doesn't mean adopting a tremendously cerebral or spiritual lifestyle that is wholly detached from the material things of life. We know that Jesus himself enjoyed all kinds of physical and material experiences, including going to weddings, and enjoying having dinner and going fishing with his friends.

Verse 6 tells us that being the people of God has eternal consequences: for ***to set the mind of the Spirit is life and peace***. But v7 warns us that if we choose to ignore God's law, setting our minds *against* what he would have us do and refusing to ***submit to God's law***, having instead a mindset that is ***hostile to God*** then ***we cannot please God***.

I learnt from *The Rest is History* podcast about the national anthems that endeavour to set out the promises that people are holding on to, offering a sense of their shared history and their values. For the people of God, this means remembering that God's message to Ezekiel for the people of God in 36:26 was ***A new heart I will give you, and a new Spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh***. And God's promise to the people of God in Jeremiah in 31:33 was ***I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people***.

We can be encouraged that being in union with Christ through the Spirit is not an optional extra but an essential part of being a Christian. When we walk according to the Spirit and set our minds on the things of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is shaping our thoughts and our hearts and our lives, reminding us of what Christ has done for us, and in us. Giving us a clearer idea of what we have committed ourselves to, and what we are looking forward to.