Home Service Sheet For 11th July 2021

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:25-32

25 My soul clings to the dust;

give me life according to your word!

26 When I told of my ways, you answered me;

teach me your statutes!

27 Make me understand the way of your precepts,

and I will meditate on your wondrous works.

28 My soul melts away for sorrow;

strengthen me according to your word!

29 Put false ways far from me

and graciously teach me your law!

30 I have chosen the way of faithfulness;

I set your rules before me.

31 I cling to your testimonies, O Lord;

let me not be put to shame!

32 I will run in the way of your commandments

when you enlarge my heart!

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your great love and blessing upon our lives today. Thank You that Your favour has no end, but rather it lasts for our entire lifetime. Forgive us for sometimes forgetting that You are intimately acquainted with all of our ways, that You know what concerns us, and You cover us as a mother hen gathers up her chicks under her wing. Cleanse us of our sin, and restore us to a right relationship with You. May we worship You today with obedience to You and to Your Word. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

Read or Sing Thou, whose almighty word, written by John Marriott

https://youtu.be/vaXV\_evnGVM

Thou, whose almighty word

chaos and darkness heard,

and took their flight;

hear us, we humbly pray,

and, where the Gospel day

sheds not its glorious ray,

let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring

on thy redeeming wing

healing and sight,

health to the sick in mind,

sight to the inly blind,

O now to all mankind,

let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,

life-giving holy Dove,

speed forth thy flight!

Move on the waters' face

bearing the lamp of grace,

and, in earth's darkest place,

let there be light!

Holy and blessèd Three,

glorious Trinity,

Wisdom, Love, Might;

boundless as ocean's tide,

rolling in fullest pride,

through the earth far and wide,

let there be light!

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible Reading Galatians 5:1-8

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you.”

Freedom is generally seen as a very positive state, whether it’s literal freedom from captivity or imprisonment, or freedom of speech, thought or other forms of expression. In our Bible reading today, though, we are talking about something quite different. Christian freedom, or ‘freedom in Christ’ as Paul puts it, is not exactly a freedom to do whatever we like. It is freedom from the slavery of sin, under the law, but the right response to it is to freely give ourselves to the One who has bought our freedom. Paul is warning the Galatians not to go back to the old kind of enforced slavery, but rather submit to Christ.

In verse 2 Paul begins his consideration of circumcision amongst the Galatians. For the Jewish people, circumcision was the physical sign of the covenant between God and His special people. It was commanded of Abraham and his descendants, but in Christ we are under the new covenant, sealed by His blood, with the sign being the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For Christians, physical circumcision has no significance. The way that Paul writes about it tells us that the false teachers who had come to Galatia were making circumcision an extra requirement for salvation. Paul, however, shows the Galatians this is untrue by making plain that the old covenant requires perfect obedience to the law – an impossibility for all human beings.

Paul goes on to make the same point even more pointedly. Just as the foreskin is cut off through the act of circumcision, so any Galatian being circumcised is cut off themselves from Jesus. It’s quite a crude way of putting it, but sometimes such bluntness is necessary! To put it another way, to be circumcised is to return to the slavery of the law, and to throw God’s gracious gift of His own Son for us back in His face. Let us instead keep our eyes focused on Jesus, and allow the Holy Spirit to fill us and enable us to live the Christian life here and now. Looking further forwards, Paul writes, “through the Spirit, by faith, we… eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness”. The only righteousness that can be ours is that of Christ Jesus. Paul is reminding us to set our sights on the hope to be realised fully when Jesus returns.

Sometimes as Christians all we are called to do is stand firm and wait. We are to wait faithfully for our Lord to return, living as though that could be any moment (as indeed it could). Interestingly Paul sets out a very similar approach to overcome the spiritual evils of the present age in Ephesians chapter 6. His focus is to stand firm in Christ, defended by the Spirit, and pray (Ephesians 6:10-13, 18). We can always do that, and that is all we ever need to do when faced with difficulties. That’s not to say that the circumstances will disappear, but rather God in Christ will always be with us by His Spirit.

When all is said and done, what truly matters is what Jesus has done for us, not what we have done. Even the act of having faith in Christ is a gift of the Spirit. Nonetheless, the Christian life is to live in obedience to the truth of the Gospel. We are saved by grace, through faith, but faith not shown through our lives is not true faith. The Galatians had been ‘hindered’ in their walk, or run, with God by the false teachers. They had been pointed away from the true Gospel of grace.

Paul makes it very clear that anyone who points us away from the true Gospel message is not from God (v.😎. This is just as important to know and recognise today as it ever was. A ‘gospel’ of works, even caring for the planet or righting social injustice, when put in the Gospel’s rightful place is not of God, but rather of the deceiver, satan. Elsewhere Paul shows us how to deal with such false teachers. “watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.” (Romans 16:17) Mark and avoid! Hold on to that which is good and true, and reject that which is false. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious and Loving God, You are the one who has made all things. You have revealed Yourself to us in Your Son, Jesus, and through Your Word You have taught us Your ways. We pray now for this world, and its people, seeking Your will and Your glory.

• Heavenly Father, we pray for our government particularly today. Help them to make good and wise decisions, specifically in the area of when and how to relax restrictions. We pray that politicians on all sides will work together for the good of our nation and its peoples.

• Heavenly Father, we pray for all who are injured or ill today. May You grant Your healing to them, and peace in the midst of their circumstances. We also think of medical professionals and other carers who seek to bring relief to those who suffer.

• Heavenly Father, we pray for Your Church throughout the world. We pray for those who face persecution for their faith in You – grant them courage and strength to keep on faithfully following You. We pray for the Methodist Church in the UK too, following the controversial decisions made at their recent Conference. May You bring them back to Yourself, Your Word and the true Gospel of Jesus.

• Heavenly Father, finally we pray for ourselves too. Help us to walk in obedience to You, and to Your Word today and every day. Grant us strength in our weaknesses, guidance in our confusion and courage in the face of difficulties. In all things, enable us to live to Your praise and glory, we pray.

Almighty God, graciously hear our prayer, for we ask it in Jesus’ Name, amen!

Blessing

Gracious God, may Your face shine upon us today. Establish the work of our hands and bring to fulfilment all that You have given us to do. We pray that You would make our way purposeful and our footsteps firm, out of Your goodness and love. Grant us wisdom to respond in obedience to Your Word, we pray, amen.