Home Service Sheet 1st October 2023

Call To Worship Psalm 77:11-15

I will remember the deeds of the Lord;

 yes, I will remember your wonders of old.

I will ponder all your work,

 and meditate on your mighty deeds.

Your way, O God, is holy.

 What god is great like our God?

You are the God who works wonders;

 you have made known your might among the peoples.

You with your arm redeemed your people,

 the children of Jacob and Joseph.

Opening Prayer

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the Earth! You alone have created the heavens and the Earth and everything in them. They speak of Your glory and proclaim Your praise! As we read Your Word we hear of the many great and wonderful things that You have done from the very beginning until this day. We are also filled with hope as we hear about the glorious future that You have planned for us, when You will live with Your people forever. We praise You for the salvation that You have graciously offered to us through the death of Your Son for us, that our sins might be forgiven. Help us today to hear of Your mighty deeds and respond to You with faith and obedience. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.

Hymn Praise to the Holiest in the height by John Henry Newman

https://youtu.be/pjPhcD75E34?si=amSUqfa6bnODFh7F

1) Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise:

In all His words most wonderful, most sure in all His ways.

2) O loving wisdom of our God! When all was sin and shame,

A second Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came.

3) O wisest love! that flesh and blood which did in Adam fail,

Should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail.

4) And that a higher gift than grace should flesh and blood refine,

God’s presence, and His very self and essence all-divine.

5) O generous love! that He, who smote in man for man the foe,

The double agony in man for man should undergo.

6) And in the garden secretly, and on the Cross on high,

Should teach his brethren, and inspire to suffer and to die.

7) Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise:

In all His words most wonderful, most sure in all His ways.

The Lord’s Prayer

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 Joshua 5:10-15

While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

Reflection

This week we return to a lesser-known passage from the Old Testament. What we find in our reading comes after the Israelites have entered the land of Canaan, and before their first victory over the inhabitants of the land at Jericho. It’s another of those in-between sections that are easy for us to pass over and ignore, and yet there is still much that we can learn from this part of God’s Word. As we are reminded in the New Testament, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) There are NO exceptions to this rule!

In verse 10 the focus is placed on Israel remembering what God has done for the people in the past, in causing the angel of death to pass over the houses of the Israelites and then on God bringing them up out of Egypt. Even in the midst of their desert wanderings and then the conquest of Canaan it was important for the people to remember what God had done and celebrate that with praise and thanksgiving. This is a helpful reminder for us to not forget all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus. We do this every time we celebrate communion together, and also as we read His Word and thank Him for it. It was a regular pattern for the people of Israel to celebrate Passover, and it is good for us to make a habit of remembering all that God has done for us.

We also read in verses 11 and 12 how this first Passover in Canaan marked the end of God’s miraculous provision of food for His people. Whilst they had been wandering in the wilderness, God had provided them with manna and quail to eat so that they did not starve to death. However, now that they were in the land of Canaan there was good produce for them to harvest and eat. In a sense this was still God’s provision, but it’s from what we might call His common grace rather than His miraculous provision. Sometimes God did special things for His people for a limited period of time, but He ultimately set up more natural and normal provision for the long run. We could perhaps compare this with the way in which God spoke through the prophets and finally His Son before the establishing of His Word as the Old and New Testaments.

In verse 13, following the marking of the Passover, we come to a particularly strange encounter between Joshua and a mysterious figure who is described as “the commander of the army of the Lord.” (v.14) We should note that this takes place around Jericho, before the Israelite siege of the large fortified city. It would have been reasonable for Joshua to assume that this man with a drawn sword was a mighty warrior from Jericho, but even so he asks him who he is. Joshua basically asks which side this man is on, which comes across as brave (or perhaps stupid)! The man replies that he is on neither human side, but rather is the commander of the Lord’s army. This is Biblical shorthand for the angels, or messengers of God, who are sometimes described with war-like language.

There is some debate over who this ‘commander’ of the Lord’s army might be. Some point to him being an archangel, such as Michael, and this is certainly possible. Others suggest this may be an appearance of the Lord Jesus before He came in flesh to Bethlehem, and this may better fit the description given here. Whichever is the case here, it is clear that Joshua recognises that he needs to listen as this being is a messenger from God. This is what he says and does in verse 14, “Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?”” Joshua recognised that doing things from his own initiative was not the way to go. Instead he needed to follow God’s plan, as do we.

The difference for us is that God has provided us with all we need to know what His will for us is, and that is found in the Bible. Joshua was told to take off his shoes for the ground on which he was standing was holy, or dedicated to God. This may point to God’s literal presence there, or to the fact that God was giving this land into the hands of the Israelites. We are highly unlikely to find ourselves in this kind of situation. However, we should recognise from God’s Word that God is holy and is to be feared, or revered. We should not take God for granted, but should rather remember what God is like, and what He had done for us. This, in turn, should fill us with awe towards and thanksgiving to God! Amen!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, how we praise and thank You for the Scriptures that provide us with illustrations of living a life that honours You, as we travel along our own life-journeys. Thank You for Joshua, whose life shows us how we continue to need practical faith and godly wisdom, if we are to succeed in our walk with You. Thank You that You gained the victory over all the enemies of our souls and that in Christ, we have been redeemed and declared righteous. Teach us Your way and help our ears to be ever open to Your leading and guidance. Help us to be good witnesses for You day by day that others might ask the reason for the hope You have placed in us. This we ask in the Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, amen.

Benediction

O Lord our God, You are holy in all Your ways and gracious in all Your dealings with us. Send us out today with a true appreciation of all that You have done for us that we might truly live in awe of You each and every day. We ask this to Your praise and glory, amen.