Home Service Sheet for Sunday 12th January 2025

Call To Worship: Isaiah 43:1-4

But now thus says the Lord,

he who created you, O Jacob,

    he who formed you, O Israel:

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

    I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

    and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

    and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God,

    the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

I give Egypt as your ransom,

    Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my eyes,

    and honoured, and I love you,

I give men in return for you,

    peoples in exchange for your life.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to You today with reverence and awe for You are a great and mighty God. You have revealed Yourself to Your people through the ages as the Holy One, the Almighty and the God of grace and mercy. You alone are worthy to receive our thanks and praise, and this is what we seek to bring You now. Help us today to focus on You and what You have shown us in Your Word. Grant to us wisdom and understanding not just so that we would know You better, but also that we might honour You through the lives that we live in faithful obedience to Your Word. These things we ask for the sake of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Hymn:   Trust and Obey by John H Sammis

<https://youtu.be/dRIS68SJ3IM?si=joybsvVhxu7_4-t_>

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,

What a glory He sheds on our way!

While we do His good will, He abides with us still,

And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way

To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,

But His smile quickly drives it away;

Not a doubt nor a fear, not a sigh nor a tear,

Can abide while we trust and obey.

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,

But our toil He doth richly repay;

Not a grief nor a loss, not a frown nor a cross,

But is blest if we trust and obey.

But we never can prove the delights of His love

Until all on the altar we lay;

For the favour He shows, for the joy He bestows,

Are for them who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet,

Or we'll walk by His side in the way;

What He says we will do, where He sends we will go;

Never fear, only trust and obey.

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: Acts 8:9-25

But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptised he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Reflection

We meet some truly odd people in life, do we not, and so it shouldn’t come as a huge surprise that we find some rather odd people in the Bible too. Our reading today from the book of Acts, tells us about an individual called Simon who lived in Samaria. The first thing we need to know about Samaria and its people is that they were despised by the Jews for not being true believers. Simon, though, was not simply a heretic, but he was a practitioner of ‘magic’. This does not mean he could just pull off a few card tricks and pull a rabbit out of a hat, though! No, this kind of ‘magic’ was the sort of thing we might call the occult in our time. It is seriously bad spiritual stuff!

Prior to the arrival of the apostles in Samaria, he had been the local celebrity who was celebrated and looked up to by many local people. Now that the Gospel message was being proclaimed, though, folk were turning away from Simon and his magic. In places like Ephesus this kind of situation caused an uproar (Acts 19:23-40), but in Samaria it was a much quieter issue. In fact, in verse 13, we are told that Simon believed the Gospel message and was baptised. So far, so good, but this is not where our reading ends.

In our day and age there are several celebrities and well-known people who say they have believed in Jesus, but within a few short years they have fallen away from the faith. Perhaps they were simply caught up in the moment, but ultimately they had not truly believed in the Lord Jesus dying in their place so that their sins might be forgiven. Their ‘faith’ was not true saving faith which is a gift given to us by God Himself. Notice how Simon was captivated by the “signs and great miracles” rather than by the message and changed lives. He was more interested in the spectacular rather than the lasting.

This can still be a problem in the Church today where people get caught up in the music, the activities and even in some places the alleged miracles that all too often turn out to be fake. Our focus needs to be on Jesus and the Scriptures because if it is then we won’t go too far wrong. With Simon we see the early signs that everything is not well. This is what we read, “when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” (vv.18-19) He thinks that he can pay money to add a new magic act to his portfolio!

The serious point here is that Simon completely misunderstood some fundamental things about the Gospel and the Christian life. He did not grasp the fact that we as human beings cannot earn or pay to receive anything from God as we are sinners separated from our Holy God. The only way we can receive salvation or anything else from God is completely through God’s gracious gifting of it to us. This is just as true today as it was in the time of the Apostles! Giving more in the offering does not guarantee God’s material blessings or healing (despite what some hucksters would have you believe). People today may not be giving money to the Church to receive an ‘indulgence’, but they may well think that it puts them in God’s good books, but it does not!

Thankfully, that is not the end of the story for Simon, either. Listen to what Peter says to him in verse 22, “Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.” Even though Simon had done something truly wicked, the door is left open for him and us too to repent of our sins and seek God’s forgiveness. However bad or evil our deeds have been, if we truly turn away from them and ask God to forgive us, He will do so. Salvation is open to all who believe in Jesus and repent of their sins. What a truly glorious Gospel we have! Amen!

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank You for Your wondrous gift of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. We acknowledge that we cannot earn or buy Your salvation or a ‘ticket to heaven’; we are completely reliant upon what You have done for us in and through Your Son, the Lord Jesus. Help us to recognise this with thankfulness. We also pray that Your Holy Spirit would empower us to proclaim the good news of the Gospel to others that they may benefit from Your salvation too. We pray for those who have been led astray from the true faith in You and have been caught up with the things of this world. Help us to be constant, faithful and loving in our witness to them. These things we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Benediction

Almighty God, thank You for making all things new in Christ. May You lead us each day of this New Year from Your Word by the ministry of Your Holy Spirit. This we ask to Your praise and glory, amen.