Dear All,

**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 13th February 2022**

**Call To Worship:                John 5:24**

(Jesus said) **24**Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

**Opening Prayer**

Loving God we praise and thank You today for Your Son, Jesus Christ, who You sent into this world to bring about salvation to eternal life. We thank You too for Your Word that brings us life and hope. Help us to respond to it with faith and obedience as our spiritual act of worship. Your love for us, O Lord, is beyond our understanding and Your grace and mercy towards us is amazing. Thank You for enabling us to taste of Your goodness and enjoy the joy of Your salvation. Help us to be assured that we are safe because of what Christ has done for us. In Jesus’ Name we pray this, amen.

**Hymn:**                                  **Standing on the Promises** by ***Russell Kelso Carter***

<https://youtu.be/HHdPlunDezc>

1 Standing on the promises of Christ, my King, through eternal ages let His praises ring;  
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing, standing on the promises of God.

***Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God, my Saviour;  
Standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God.***

2 Standing on the promises that cannot fail. When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
By the living Word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God.

3 Standing on the promises I now can see perfect present cleansing in the blood for me;

Standing in the liberty where Christ makes free, standing on the promises of God.

4 Standing on the promises of Christ, the Lord, bound to Him eternally by love's strong cord,  
Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword, standing on the promises of God.

5 Standing on the promises I cannot fall, listening every moment to the Spirit's call,  
Resting in my Saviour as my all in all, standing on the promises of God.

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 Readings:                  Hebrews 6:1-12**

**1**Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2**and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3**And this we will do if God permits.**4**For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5**and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, **6**and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. **7**For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. **8**But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

**9**Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things - things that belong to salvation. **10**For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. **11**And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, **12**so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

**Reflection**

In the previous chapter of this letter to the Hebrews we were reminded, or rather challenged, about the need to move on from spiritual milk to spiritual meat. A diet of only the basic teachings of the Christian faith will only produce babes in Christ, but as we are reminded in chapter 6 today we are meant to grow to maturity in Christ. Maturity, in practice, means that we live out the realities of the Bible’s teachings day by day. We are to live not by the ways of the sinful flesh, but by the law of the Spirit which leads us into eternal life.

The author of the letter makes it clear that this foundation of our faith is laid once, and once only. We cannot go back to the start and begin again. Using a similar kind of thinking, the Apostle Paul writes, “you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone”. (Ephesians 2:19-20) Everything that is built upon a foundation relies upon that, and it cannot be relaid once the structure has been built. Whether we are talking about our faith in Christ, the Church, or a physical building, the same principle applies.

This brings us to the question that is answered for us in verses 4 to 6, ‘what about people who have come to faith in Jesus but have then ‘fallen away’? Is it possible for someone to have faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation, later fall away, and then later still come back again? This is one of those difficult theological questions on which people disagree. It seems to me that Scripture teaches that salvation begins at the point at which we have faith in Christ, and this cannot be reversed. However, that does raise the issue of people who appear to make a Christian commitment and then turn away from Jesus and His Church. Have they abandoned their faith, or is something else happening?

Some would say that these folk never truly had faith in Jesus in the first place, perhaps like the seed that landed on shallow soil in Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matthew 13)? Jesus explained this as follows, “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy,yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” (Vv. 20-21) It is similar for the seed which fell among thorns. Such folk appear to receive the Gospel, but ultimately they never fully commit to Jesus’ Lordship, and so ultimately fall away.

This also appears to be the point being made by the agricultural illustration in verses 7 and 8 of our Bible reading. Faith which does not produce fruit, or works, is not true faith at all. Fruit is not something that is just produced for one brief season, but it is produced throughout the life of the plant. So it is with those of us who follow Jesus as His disciples. If we truly have faith in Him then it will be seen through the way that we live our lives from that day forth and forever. People can fake good fruit for a period of time, especially in public, but in private and over time other things get in the way and the truth will come out in that person’s life decisions and actions.

Yet there is also good news in our reading today. We can still know full assurance of hope for eternal life through our faith in Jesus Christ. In verses 11 and 12 we read, “we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” If we are consistently following Jesus and showing that through our actions then we can have assurance that we are in Christ. It’s not that the acts themselves put us right with God, because of course they cannot. Rather they are the evidence that we truly have faith in Christ and that the Holy Spirit is dwelling within us, transforming us little by little into the very image of Jesus. Do our lives reflect that we are truly in Christ Jesus? If not, there is thankfully still time for us to truly place our faith in Him for eternal life. Our God is loving, merciful and forgiving – hallelujah! Amen!

**Pastoral Prayer**

Heavenly Father, may we each mature in faith and walk in the light, as Jesus is in the light. Help us to move on from dabbling in the basics of faith. May we grow into a deeper awareness of all that You would teach us from Your Word. Help us to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Keep us walking in spirit and truth, and enable us to learn patient endurance so that we may become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Help us all to increasingly abide in Christ and He in us. Heavenly Father, You are a good and righteous God whose faithfulness continues from one generation to the next. Thank You for Your great salvation! May You grant us opportunities to minister, in love, to one another. Thank You that nothing we do ever goes unnoticed by You. May our lives be a daily witness and living sacrifice to Your grace and goodness. This we ask in Jesus' Name, amen.

**Benediction**

Send us out, O Lord, with faith, hope and love to live our lives as Your people in this world that You have created. Fill us afresh with the full assurance of hope in Your salvation until the end, we pray. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen!