Home Service Sheet for Sunday 15th May 2022

Call To Worship:                Psalm 25:1-5

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
    let me not be put to shame;
    let not my enemies exult over me.
Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
    they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
    teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
    for you are the God of my salvation;
    for you I wait all the day long.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father we thank You for Your amazing power and work in our lives. We thank You also for Your goodness and love towards us in Jesus. Thank You that You have given us hope, even in the toughest of times, strengthening us for Your purposes. Thank You for Your mercy and grace, and for the wonderful truth that You are always with us and will never leave us nor forsake us. Thank You for sending Your Son into this world to die and rise again for us, so that we might have forgiveness for our sins and eternal life. Help us to set our eyes on You afresh today. Lord, we give You our praise and thanks, for You alone are worthy! In Jesus’ Name, amen.

Hymn                            Stand up and bless the Lord by James Montgomery
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yMNnSX92ig>

Stand up and bless the Lord, ye people of His choice;
Stand up and bless the Lord your God with heart, and soul, and voice.

Though high above all praise, above all blessing high,
Who would not fear His holy name, and laud and magnify?

O, for the living flame from His own altar brought,
To touch our lips, our minds inspire, and wing to Heaven our thought!

There, with benign regard, our hymns He deigns to hear;
Though unrevealed to mortal sense, the spirit feels Him near.

God is our strength and song, and His salvation ours;
Then be His love in Christ proclaimed with all our ransomed powers.

Stand up and bless the Lord, the Lord your God adore;
Stand up, and bless His glorious name henceforth for evermore.

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.

1st Bible Reading:              2 Kings 22:11-20

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”

So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her. And she said to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: ‘Tell the man who sent you to me, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.’” And they brought back word to the king.

2nd Bible Reading:              1 Peter 5:6-11

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Sermon

What were king Josiah and his people to do now, as they truly were, to quote the Eighteenth Century American preacher and theologian, Jonathan Edwards, ‘sinners in the hands of an angry God’? In fact, that is the position that we all find ourselves in before we come to God the Father through our Lord Jesus, by faith. We have all sinned and fallen short of God’s holy standards which He has laid out in His law, and God is rightly angry about that. Above all else God reveals Himself to be holy in His Word, and our sins truly offend Him and provoke Him to wrath. The law is given to show us that we are sinners, but more than that, to also show us that we need a Saviour to step in and sort things out for us.

Josiah did not know such a saviour, but God nonetheless was gracious and merciful to him and to the people. He gave them a glimpse of the grace that would be fully revealed in and through the person, life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. God spoke of His holiness and anger, but then followed this up with His grace and mercy. “Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you… Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.” (Vv.18-20)

God did not treat Josiah and his people as they deserved, and in an even greater way He does not treat us as we deserve. For this very reason we should be very thankful to Him. Our sins deserve the punishment of judgment and hell, and yet we receive eternal life through Jesus Christ. Josiah received a promise of peace and a natural death, and this is as much as anyone under the old covenant could hope to receive from God. The Lord pinpoints Josiah’s humility and sorrow for his sin as key reasons for His mercy towards the king. In a sense, Josiah recognised his own sin, and that of his people. He recognised that he had a problem and did all he could about it – he cried out to God with weeping and sorrow. “great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book” are the words of Josiah.

Do we recognise the wrath of God that is kindled against us because of our sin? Perhaps we don’t take our own sins seriously enough today, as Christians? Do we humble ourselves before God in prayer? Do we weep over our own wrong doing? Or do we just say a quick prayer and think that’s all over now? Yes, we have the promise of forgiveness from God our Father, if we ask for forgiveness and truly repent of our sins, but we do need to repent. If we keep on living in sin, doing the same things time and again, the awful truth is that we have not actually repented at all. Scripture says that if we do not repent then we are in trouble – those who continue to live in unrepentant sin will not inherit the kingdom. We cannot simply redefine sin to suit our preferences, or the values of the world – God has already revealed what is sin to us in His Word, and we must live by that, because we will be judged by those holy standards at the end when Jesus returns.

So how are we to live today, as followers of Jesus Christ, under the New Covenant, sealed by Christ’s blood? This is where our New Testament reading from Peter’s first letter comes in. Verse 6 of that reading is particularly instructive for us, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” I want to suggest that the truths found in this verse require three things of us. Peter also warns us of the activity of the devil in this world, and the need to resist him, with the help of God. We may face persecution and trials, but if we will hold firm in our faith then ultimately everything will be ok. So what will help us in the here and now?

First, we must humble ourselves before God. It sounds very worthy and good, but what does this look like in practice? It certainly means that we need to recognise our own weakness and sinfulness. We must not think of ourselves as better than we are, but rather we need to understand that we are flawed creatures, much lesser than our great Creator, and reliant upon Him. God is our Master, our Lord, and we need to listen to His Word and obey it. That is what humility looks like in practice.

Second, we must recognise who God is and what He is like. God is mighty and holy, Peter reminds us here. In the beginning God created the world and everything in it. Without God the world in which we live would not exist, and neither would we. God has never done anything wrong, and in fact He is simply incapable of doing wrong. He is not like us – although we are made in the image of God, that image has been distorted and broken. We can do nothing of any significance without God, and He can do whatever He likes.

Third, to live well as followers of Jesus we need to cast all our anxieties or worries on God. This means that we don’t continue to think that we can sort out our own lives by ourselves. If we are in a difficult situation, or are being persecuted, we need to hand that over to God in prayer. That is not to say that God will take us out of that situation, or remove that difficulty, but rather He will be with us in the midst of it. This speaks to us of God’s love and care for people, but not to the exclusion of His holiness and justice. The consequences of our sin will still follow on, and we may still suffer illness and violence against us. Nonetheless God has filled us with His Holy Spirit, and He comforts us and grants us the peace and strength to carry on anyway.

Peter concludes this section of his letter by writing, “after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you”. Again we need to understand what time scale Peter is talking about here. In all likelihood he is not talking about this life and our human lifespans. Rather he is writing about that time that shall surely come, when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. At that point all things will be put right, and He will restore and establish those of us who have true faith in Him in His eternal kingdom. Those who have rejected Him through unbelief or unrepentant sin will be condemned to hell. Therefore we need to remain firm in our faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father, we confess that for too long, we have depended on ourselves alone to sort out the problems we face. We thank You today that You care so much for us that we can cast all our burdens on You and give You all the hurts, disappointments, and worries, that we face. Keep us humble and help us to cast all our cares and worries upon You. Help us to take seriously the warning that the devil prowls around seeking to destroy us, and may we rely on You in all things, so that we may not stumble and fall but stand fast today and every day. Help us, and all our brothers and sisters in Christ, to resist the devil and stand firm in the faith, through Christ who is our life. We pray for Christians around the world who are going through persecution, trials and difficulties and we thank You that You have given each one of us the strength we need to resist the devil in this evil day. May we all be enabled to stand fast on the promises of God our Saviour. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Benediction

Heavenly Father, send us out today trusting ever more completely in You. Keep us to truly humble each day, and remind us to cast our anxieties on to You, knowing that You care for us. May also the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon this day and forever, amen.