Home Service Sheet for Sunday 15th September 2024

Call to Worship Revelation 21:1-4

The apostle John writes of the vision that God gave him as follows,

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Prayer

Glory be to You, O Lord, for You have created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. Through Your grace and mercy, You have invited us into Your family and at the end of time You will draw all Your people together where we will live with You forever. Loving God, You revealed Your plan of salvation through the prophets and brought it to pass in the coming of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You today for Your love and forgiveness. Help us to focus on You so that we might be reminded of all that You have done for us and all that You will do for us in the future. This we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Hymn Glorious things of thee are spoken by John Newton

<https://youtu.be/3EWLNar8J9c?si=LJDij1nSeyKYcfAz>

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God!

He, whose Word cannot be broken, formed thee for His own abode.

On the Rock of Ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose?

With salvation’s walls surrounded, thou may’st smile at all thy foes.

See! the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love;

Well supply thy sons and daughters, and all fear of want remove:

Who can faint while such a river ever flows their thirst t’assuage?

Grace, which like the Lord, the giver, never fails from age to age.

Blest inhabitants of Zion, washed in the Redeemer’s blood!

Jesus, whom their souls rely on, makes them kings and priests to God.

‘Tis His love His people raises, over self to reign as kings,

And as priests, His solemn praises each for a thank offering brings.

Savior, if of Zion’s city, I through grace a member am,

Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in Thy name.

Fading is the worldling’s pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show;

Solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion’s children know.

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 Joel 3:17-21

“So you shall know that I am the Lord your God,

    who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain.

And Jerusalem shall be holy,

    and strangers shall never again pass through it.

“And in that day

the mountains shall drip sweet wine,

    and the hills shall flow with milk,

and all the streambeds of Judah

    shall flow with water;

and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord

    and water the Valley of Shittim.

“Egypt shall become a desolation

    and Edom a desolate wilderness,

for the violence done to the people of Judah,

    because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

But Judah shall be inhabited forever,

    and Jerusalem to all generations.

I will avenge their blood,

    blood I have not avenged,

    for the Lord dwells in Zion.”

Reflection

We began our series from the book of the prophet Joel with a message of judgment and a call to repentance for God’s people Israel, but today we conclude it with a hope filled message for the future. Throughout the history of God’s dealings with His people we see a pattern. God calls Israel to Himself, they follow His ways at first, but then ultimately reject God and do what seems right to them. Following this, God brings judgment upon the people before calling them to repent. If they listen, then God will restore them and the pattern repeats. We see this same pattern many times, right from the days of Moses until the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

Earlier in the book that bears his name, Joel spoke about the pouring out of God’s Spirit, and it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that enables God’s people today to do a better job of remaining faithful, albeit not perfect in their walk with God. Yet, until Jesus returns and brings the kingdom of God in all its fullness, there remains a need for repentance from sin. We have not been fully sanctified. There is still a glorious future that is ahead of us when we will live with God forever, and be made perfect. The Israelites were shown a glimpse of this, but we have a much clearer picture of this now through Jesus. More of God and His plans have been revealed to us, but we still do not have the wondrous full picture that God alone has.

In these last few verses of Joel, God makes clear His ultimate purpose, and that all that is His own glory! God’s reputation amongst the peoples and nations of the Earth is of the utmost importance. What happens to God’s people reflects on Him, and He has a deep longing for His people to be like Him, reflecting His glory. In verse 17, God reveals His divine name, YHWH, and prophesies that Jerusalem will be holy. This has not yet happened in the literal, physical and geographic city of Jerusalem. In its streets and among its inhabitants, sins are still committed today and have been throughout history. So, when should we expect this prophecy to be fulfilled? I believe the most likely answer is in the new Jerusalem about which we read in the book of Revelation.

In verse 18 we find the phrase ‘in that day’ that we’ve seen earlier in the book. Again this clearly refers to a future time – likely the day when Jesus returns to judge all people. At that time “the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk”. When God spoke to Moses about the Promised Land of Canaan, He described it as a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:17). This is a promise of the new Jerusalem being even better than the original Promised Land. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is described as being like new wine filling new wine skins, so perhaps this is a linking together of the provision of God for both the physical and spiritual needs of His people.

There is a contrast between the blessings that God will give to His people and their land, and the description of what He will do to Egypt and Edom. The reference to Egypt and Edom in verse 19 is simply representing those who oppose and reject God. These two nations had been some of the worst oppressors of Israel in the Old Testament. We should therefore understand the desolation prophesied for them as being for those who reject the Gospel message of Jesus. Jesus tells us that those who reject the Gospel are already condemned (John 3:18), and so this desolation may refer to hell.

The big picture of Joel’s prophecy is a glorious future for all who trust in God’s Son. All who believe in Christ will have the Holy Spirit not only poured out upon them but dwelling inside them. The Promised Land of Canaan was just a foreshadowing and dim reflection of the glorious reality of the future Kingdom of God that the Lord will bring about for all those who He has adopted as sons and daughters. In the meantime, there will be much suffering and oppression, but this will pale into insignificance compared with the reality of the new heavens and the new earth of which the apostle John received a vision. It is with this glorious vision that we began our time together this afternoon, and we shall conclude with it too.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” What a wondrous and glorious future God has prepared for those who love Him! Amen!

Prayer of intercession

Gracious Lord, we pray for those who are lonely in this world. We hope in the promise that the home of God will be among people: that You will dwell with us. We mention in our hearts those we know who are lonely or isolated at this time. Lord, we pray for those who are in pain, suffering from illness either physical or mental. We hope in the promise that crying and pain will be no more. Loving God, we pray for those who are thirsty for Your truth, love and grace; those who seek after You with earnest hearts. We hope in the promise that You will give water to the thirsty without cost from the spring of the water of life. These things we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Prayer of Blessing

Almighty and Everlasting God, send us out with hope for the future You have prepared for us, love for others that reflects Your love for this world and joy at the reality of being adopted in Your family. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.