**Home Service Sheet For 16th June 2024**

Call to Worship: Exodus 34:6-8

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You today recognising that You are God, full of grace and mercy, slow to anger and full of love and faithfulness. Upon Your grace we depend, because we have sinned against You. Yet, out of Your love and mercy You sent Your Son into this world to die in our place and be the perfect sacrificial Lamb who paid the price for our sin. Lord, we praise You and thank You for drawing us back to Yourself and making us Your children. May we respond to You as Moses did with reverent worship and obedience. This we ask for Jesus’ sake, amen.

Hymn When we walk with the Lord by John H Sammis

<https://youtu.be/dRIS68SJ3IM?si=1Qx9bK-t3NiVkjJ1>

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 burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,

But our toil He doth richly repay;

Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or 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 Joel 1:13-20

Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests;

    wail, O ministers of the altar.

Go in, pass the night in sackcloth,

    O ministers of my God!

Because grain offering and drink offering

    are withheld from the house of your God.

Consecrate a fast;

    call a solemn assembly.

Gather the elders

    and all the inhabitants of the land

to the house of the Lord your God,

    and cry out to the Lord.

Alas for the day!

For the day of the Lord is near,

    and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

Is not the food cut off

    before our eyes,

joy and gladness

    from the house of our God?

The seed shrivels under the clods;

    the storehouses are desolate;

the granaries are torn down

    because the grain has dried up.

How the beasts groan!

    The herds of cattle are perplexed

because there is no pasture for them;

    even the flocks of sheep suffer.

To you, O Lord, I call.

For fire has devoured

    the pastures of the wilderness,

and flame has burned

    all the trees of the field.

Even the beasts of the field pant for you

    because the water brooks are dried up,

and fire has devoured

    the pastures of the wilderness.

Reflection

Last week we heard the message of judgment that God pronounced on Israel through the prophet Joel and were challenged to consider our own responsibility for sin. Today, as we continue to think about the message of Joel, we hear some more direct teaching addressing exactly what the people needed to do in response. Verse 13 specifically addresses the priests and ‘ministers of our God’. Whereas earlier in the chapter all of Israel was spoken to, here it is the religious leaders who are told what they must do. They are to publicly lament and wear sackcloth.

We might wonder what the purpose of these instructions could possibly be. Why should the religious leaders of Israel make a public show of grief? There are two likely answers to this question. One of them is to show God that they are serious about their sin and desire to change. The other is for them to lead the people by example. In other words, if the people see their religious leaders publicly wailing and crying out to God, then they will see and follow the same pattern themselves. In reality this is a call for God’s people to repent of their sin.

We are also called to repentance today as followers of Christ. When we sin, as we all do (1 John 1:8), we must not simply carry on as we are, presuming that God will forgive us. Rather, we are to confess our sin to God in prayer and turn away from that sin towards God’s perfect ways. Repentance means turning away from the road that leads to judgment and turning towards the way that leads us into eternal life with God. The message we read from God in verse 14 is a call to prayer, “Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.”

We need to recognise that when we sin it is not us who can really do anything about it. However hard we try, we cannot right the wrongs that we have done, because the consequences of sin are eternal. The only One who can forgive us and transform us is God. The Israelites should have known this, but God graciously reminded them of this through the prophet Joel. If this was true for Israel, how much more true is it for us as Christians today. We can have confidence in approaching God because we have a great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has already died in our place and paid the price for our sin. We have a great High Priest who even now is seated at the Father’s ride hand making intercession for us. It is because of Jesus that we know that we will be forgiven if we confess our sins and repent of them.

God goes on to warn the people of the ‘day of the LORD’ in verse 15. This is the day of judgment, when God deals with people justly. When the prophet Joel spoke these words, the day in question was something close at hand that would demonstrate God’s holiness and judgment. However, it also foreshadows the end day of judgment when Jesus will return to judge all people. It is described in our reading as “destruction from the Almighty” and will result in sinners who do not have faith in Christ being sent to hell.

Verses 16 to 20 of our reading speak of the judgment that Israel had already seen in their day. It included a lack of food, spoiled harvests and the suffering of livestock, all of which would have been catastrophic for the people. Without food human beings will die, and without adequate food they will grow weak and become vulnerable to attack and disease. This is a picture of how all people are today without the Lord Jesus. Sin makes us weak and will ultimately lead to our destruction by God if we do not turn to Him. Thankfully, though, we may also cry out to the Lord for He is full of grace, mercy and forgiveness in and through His Son, Jesus. Amen!

Prayer

Gracious and ever-loving God we recognise that we are greatly blessed to have found our rest in You and may live under Your grace. Lord, there are times when we have failed to live righteously, and we confess that we have not trusted You as we ought. Keep us from falling back into the sin of worry and unbelief, like the people of Israel. Prevent us from trying to sort out our lives in our own strength, instead of trusting in Your Word. Thank You that You are our God and that in You we have all that we need for life and righteousness. Help us and all Your people to walk in Your ways and honour Your holy name. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

Blessing

May the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and all whom we love this day and forevermore, amen.