Home Service Sheet for Sunday 17th July 2022

Call To Worship:                Psalm 25:6-10

Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,
    for they have been from of old.
Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
    according to your steadfast love remember me,
    for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!
Good and upright is the Lord;
    therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
He leads the humble in what is right,
    and teaches the humble his way.
All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
    for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise You and thank You for Your grace and mercy that You have shown towards us in and through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Even while we were still sinners, separated from You by our sin, You sent Your only Son to earth to live a life that pointed to You, to proclaim a message that might reconcile us to You and to die a death that would pay the price for our sin. Lord, we thank You and praise You today that You have saved us and washed us clean of our sins. You have adopted us into Your family and called us Your children. Hallelujah! Amen!

Hymn                            Thou whose Almighty Word by John Marriott
<https://youtu.be/OGuUQjDkQA4>

Thou, whose almighty Word chaos and darkness heard,
And took their flight; hear us, we humbly pray,
And, where the Gospel-day sheds not its glorious ray, let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love, life-giving holy Dove,
Speed forth thy flight! Move on the waters' face
Bearing the gifts of grace, and, in earth's darkest place, let there be light!

Holy and blessèd Three, glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might; boundless as ocean's tide,
Rolling in fullest pride, through the world far and wide, let there be light!

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:          Colossians 1:9-14

9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Reflection

Last week we started to study Paul’s letter to the Colossians. In the opening verses we were encouraged by Paul’s thanksgiving for the believers, and through their growth in faith and the fruit of their lives. We were reminded that this is normal for all believers to grow in faith and continue to produce the fruit of good works as pleases God our Father. It was also clear that it is right to pray for our Christian brothers and sisters to grow in their faith. Today we continue to read what Paul goes on to write to the believers in Colossae. Paul assures them of his continuing prayers for them in verse 9 and goes on to specify exactly what he and Timothy have been praying for them.

This gives us some very helpful hints about what we should be praying for one another as Christians, as well as for ourselves. Paul writes that he has been “asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will…” The question is what exactly does he mean by this request – what does it mean to know the will of God? This is certainly a debated matter amongst Christians. Some believe that God gives people ‘impressions’ as to what they should be doing, whereas others believe that God has already spoken all that needs to be said in His Word. Certainly, the Scriptures give us a very clear message about the general will of God for humanity, and if we remain within the boundaries of that then we are going to be fine.

Let me illustrate what I mean by this. In the Bible we are given various instructions that apply to all Christians. We are to have faith in Christ and produce the fruit of good works in our lives. This is the will of God, and there are lots of examples of good works laid out for us throughout the Scriptures. The qualifications for different roles, or offices, in the life of the church are also laid out for us in the Bible, and if we meet these requirements then we are qualified for such service and may serve our local church in those ways. That is the will of God. The question is whether God specifically wants us to serve in place A rather than place B?

God may, by His providence, make things happen so that we find ourselves in place A and we can fulfil His will for us by serving in that place. Equally we could serve Him in place B and that would also be pleasing to God and part of His will. Does God ‘speak’ to us through other means to tell us whether we should serve Him in place A or place B? My opinion is that He does not do so, as He can use us wherever we are. He has revealed to us His general will through the Bible and this is sufficient for us to live lives that are pleasing to Him. If He has specific plans for us, He will work through circumstances to make sure that we are in the right place at the right time to do what He wants us to do because He is in control of all things and can make these things happen.

Firstly, then, I believe the sure-fire way for us to know God’s will is to read His Word carefully and prayerfully. Secondly, as we grow in Him and mature as Christians we will gain “spiritual wisdom and understanding”. This is something that develops in us over time as we follow Jesus, spend time with His people, pray and read His Word. It is not something that we are magically given overnight, but rather something we gain from God over time through our own effort and the work of the Holy Spirit. What is clear in Paul’s writing here is that so much of the growth of Christians is gradual and takes time and effort.

The moment of salvation, when we pass from death to eternal life, is instantaneous, but living as disciples of Christ is a process. So, what does this look like in practice? We are to walk “in a manner worthy of God and pleasing to Him”. In other words, how we live matters greatly to God. Our choices will not earn us salvation, but they will please God if they are the right ones. Many things are made very clear in God’s Word. Lies, extra-marital sex, idolatry and many other things are clearly sinful, whereas obedience to God’s law is good. These things have been decided by God before the world was created and we cannot redefine God’s ways.

The final thing that Paul shows us here about the Christian life is that we need endurance, patience, and joy (v.11). We need these things because, without them, we will struggle in this world. Many things are neither as God intended them to be, or how we would like them to be and so we will get upset, angry and frustrated with the reality of life today. However, as we grow as Christians, the Spirit will help us to grow in our patience, endurance, and joy. Joy is not simply happiness, but rather a deep-down gladness that rejoices in God regardless of the circumstances. It is not affected by the bad things that happen in this world, but rather by the wondrous things God has already done for us in Christ and has promised us for the future. Amen!

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the glorious Gospel of grace and the wonderful truths that are contained in Your word. Help us to abide in Christ and live our lives in total dependence upon You so that we may be fruitful where You have placed us. We also pray that our brothers and sisters in Christ may continue to grow in grace, so that they too may live a life that is pleasing to You. May they be strengthened with all power according to Your glorious might, so that in Christ they may patiently endure amidst the trials and difficulties of life - with all joy in believing and knowing that Your strength is made perfect in our weakness. Gracious God, we thank You that in Your grace You designed Your amazing plan of redemption so that we who were lost sinners could be redeemed by the shed blood of Christ Jesus our Lord. May we never forget what it cost You to die for us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!

Benediction

Loving God, send us out today with a full knowledge of the wonderful truth of Your Gospel. Empower us to share the good news with all those who we meet day by day, and may You grant to them the gift of faith that they too would be adopted into Your family. May Your grace, mercy and peace go with us all today and forevermore, amen.