**Home Service Sheet 19th November 2023**

**Call To Worship                 Psalm 68:17-20**

**17**The chariots of God are twice ten thousand,
    thousands upon thousands;
    the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary.
**18**You ascended on high,
    leading a host of captives in your train
    and receiving gifts among men,
even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

**19**Blessed be the Lord,
    who daily bears us up;
    God is our salvation.
**20**Our God is a God of salvation,
    and to God, the Lord, belong deliverances from death.

**Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, we praise You and thank You that You are the God of salvation, who rescues us from all our foes, including sin and death. In You alone can we be truly secure. You, O Lord, have blessed us with the gifts of life and life eternal through the Word made flesh, Your Son, Jesus Christ. None can compare with You in Your might, majesty and authority! To You alone belongs all the praise for ever. Help us today to listen attentively to Your Word that we may understand it with the help of Your Holy Spirit and apply it in our lives that You would be glorified. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

**Hymn                                     Let us sing to the God of salvation**by ***Richard Bewes***

<https://youtu.be/KU3yTLEX6LQ?si=zi2YXaY0jVtKwpCL>

1 Let us sing to the God of salvation, let us sing to the Lord our rock;
Let us come to His house with thanksgiving, let us come before the Lord and sing!

***Praise our maker, praise our saviour, praise the Lord our everlasting King:
Every throne must bow before Him - God is Lord of everything!***

2 In His hand are the earth's deepest places, and the strength of the hills is His;
All the sea is the Lord's, for He made it - by His hand the solid rock was formed.

3 Let us worship the Lord our maker, let us kneel to the Lord our God;
For we all are the sheep of His pasture; He will guide us by His powerful hand.

4 Let today be the time when you hear Him! May our hearts not be hard or cold,
Lest we stray from the Lord in rebellion as His people did in time of old.

**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                     Ephesians 4:7-16**

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

**(**In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

**Reflection**

Today, as we take our last look at Paul’s letter to the Ephesians for a little while, I want us to focus on the gifts that God has graciously given to us, His people. It would be easy to get caught up in the details of the first four verses of our reading, but to do so would, I suspect, not be all that helpful. All we really need to understand is that by coming down to Earth from heaven Jesus has shown us the Father and opened up the way of salvation. By rising again from the dead, He has gifted us with salvation. By returning to the Father in heaven and sending the Holy Spirit He has given us all that we need to share the message of the Gospel with the world.

Verse 11 onwards gives us some important details as to exactly how God has equipped us and His whole Church to live and minister to His praise and glory. In verse 11 Paul tells us of 5 gifts that God has given to build up the Church – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (shepherds) and teachers. Firstly, we have to recognise that these five roles are not all the same. Apostles and prophets were important for establishing the Church in the first place (Ephesians 2:20), as it was through them that the Gospel message was affirmed and proclaimed in the first place. It is their divinely inspired words that make up the New Testament through which Jesus is revealed to us today. For this reason, I believe that the roles of apostle and prophet are no longer active in the Church today as we don’t need to keep on building this foundation.

The other three roles, or offices, that Paul mentions continue to be needed for the growing and maturing of the Church and her members. Evangelists proclaim the good news of the Gospel to which people may respond with faith in Christ. Pastors (or shepherds) are needed to care for, correct and guide God’s people. Teachers help us, with the aid of God’s Spirit, to understand and apply the Word of God, the Scriptures. All three of these roles are very important gifts that God has given us to equip and build up the Church. We should also note Paul’s language in verse 12 that makes it clear that all of us are directly involved in the work of the Church.

In verse 13 Paul returns to the important theme of unity, but here the emphasis is very clear. He writes that we are to “attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood”. This unity is built upon the truth – the truth of God’s Word, the truth of the Gospel and the truth of who Jesus is. It is out of this kind of thinking that the great creeds, or statements of belief, of the Church were written down and agreed upon. Sadly, some people within the Church today seem to think that Christian maturity means agreeing to disagree on some of the central beliefs of the Christian faith. Paul makes it quite clear that the opposite is true!

The contrast in verse 14 describes immature believers being “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” This is not how God’s people are supposed to live, and yet there are still those people who chase after the latest teaching or novel idea today in the Church. Scripture tells us to tread the older paths that have been cut out and defined by the Scriptures. When God has revealed something clearly to us in His Word there is no room for debate or personal opinion, regardless of whether we like what God has said or not. It is important for us as Christians to submit to God’s Word and obey it, rather than think that we might know better than God Himself!

In verse 15 Paul gives us the Christian antidote to false teaching and immaturity. We are to speak “the truth in love” and “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ”. We are to stick to the truths that God has revealed in His Word, sharing them with others in a loving way. By this, and through the example of our lives becoming ever more like Jesus, we point others back to Jesus and His Word. We are equipped to do this through the work of the pastors and teachers that God has gifted to us. We don’t need a huge intellect, but rather we need attentive ears to listen to the Word with the help of the Holy Spirit. We must then put that into action with obedience to that Word. Let us seek this true unity by carefully following the Word and living by it. Amen.

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the wonderful way that You have protected Your Word through the foundation of the apostles and prophets, where Christ Himself is the chief Cornerstone. Thank You also, for those that You have gifted and called to be evangelists, pastors and teachers. We pray that You would equip each one for the service to which they are called, and may their lives and ministries bring glory to You. Thank You that You are building us up in the faith and equipping us for service. Help us to serve You faithfully through our proclaiming the Gospel and living it out day by day. This we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

**Benediction**

Loving God, help us each to grow in our faith, in unity with all our brothers and sisters in Christ and in an ever-increasing knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Father, we long for that day when, together with all the saints of God, we shall all be fully mature and reach a measure of the fullness of Christ. In His Name and for His glory we ask this, amen.