**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 20th February 2022**

**Call To Worship:                Psalm 1:1-6**

**1**Blessed is the man
    who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
    nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
**2**but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
    and on his law he meditates day and night.

**3**He is like a tree
    planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
    and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
**4**The wicked are not so,
    but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

**5**Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
    nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
**6**for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
    but the way of the wicked will perish.

**Opening Prayer (Based on Daniel 2:20-23)**

Heavenly Father, we lift up Your Name in our praise today knowing that all wisdom and power are Yours. It is You alone who changes the times and the seasons; You depose rulers and raise up others. You, O Lord, give wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning, and You reveal deep and hidden things, exposing them in Your light. We thank and praise you, God of our ancestors: You have given each of us a measure of Your wisdom and power, and You have made Yourself known to us. Help us to hear and obey Your Word today for we ask this to Your praise and glory, amen.

**Hymn:**                                  **My hope is built on nothing less**by ***Edward Mote***

[***https://youtu.be/u2jPVdl\_Bh8***](https://youtu.be/u2jPVdl_Bh8)

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

***On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand –***

***All other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.***

When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace;

In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, His blood, support me in the whelming flood;

When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found,

Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

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:              Jeremiah 17:5-10**

**5**Thus says the Lord:
“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
    and makes flesh his strength,
    whose heart turns away from the Lord.
**6**He is like a shrub in the desert,
    and shall not see any good come.
He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
    in an uninhabited salt land.

**7**“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
    whose trust is the Lord.
**8**He is like a tree planted by water,
    that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
    for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
    for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

**9**The heart is deceitful above all things,
    and desperately sick;
    who can understand it?
**10**“I the Lord search the heart
    and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
    according to the fruit of his deeds.”

**2nd Bible Reading:             Luke 6:20-23**

**20**And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

**21**“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

**22**“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! **23**Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

**Reflection (Revd Dr Paul Severs)**

Ken Dodd sang that happiness is the greatest gift, although I don’t know if it is true, in his experience, that he was really thankful to God. Bob Dylan, in his ‘Christian phase’, sang “I’ll leave this old world with a satisfied mind”. Two famous, wealthy entertainers expressed a view that, more than anything else they'd achieved, the thing they valued most was being happy. Now, of course, it is easy to be happy when all is going well, but the Bible speaks of a kind of happiness that does not depend on happenings, but is rather the gift of God. It uses a specific word to describe those who are happy in this way - it occurred 6 times in our readings - did you spot it? The word ‘blessed’ - Hebrews ‘baruch’, Greek ‘makarios’. It means greatly fortunate, or to be envied. Subjectively it means deeply joyful, contented, or satisfied, and it is a joy that is not affected by adverse circumstances, unlike worldly happiness.

Psalm 1 describes certain practices that are essential to being blessed, and in Luke 6 Jesus gives 4 reasons why His disciples can be deeply happy in spite of very difficult circumstances that they will find themselves in. Ultimately, though, the root cause of this blessedness is explained in Jeremiah 17:7, ‘Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh , whose trust is Yahweh.’ This is the very foundation of receiving God's blessing - complete and utter trust in God. We will come to this, but first we’ll look at Luke 6, then Psalm 1, before returning to Jeremiah 17 (1) the promises of blessing, then (2) the practices that lead to blessing, and (3) the prerequisite of blessing.

**First**, Jesus' 4 promises of blessing (Luke 6:20-22) ‘Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man!’ Perhaps we are more familiar with the 8 beatitudes of the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5, which are not just a random collection of promises. Rather they are a description of practical characteristics required to become a disciple of Jesus. They explain why Jesus' followers can be truly happy in a world that is hostile to Christ & his people - they know what their reward is! Some scholars say this is just Luke’s version of the beatitudes, whereas the truth is that Jesus taught the same truths over and over again in different places, using slightly different words on different occasions. This is just one such OTHER occasion!

On this occasion He speaks first about the poor, by which He did not mean those with little income or few material possessions, but as in Matthew 5 those who recognise that they are poor IN SPIRIT. They know that they have nothing that is of value to God, nothing by which they can earn God's favour. That is where we all need to begin if we would become Jesus’ disciples - humbly confessing our need of forgiveness and cleansing from sin. That is how we become a member of God's Kingdom, in contrast to those who thought themselves to be righteous by their own merits and thought they were rich towards God, especially the Pharisees, Sadducees and Jewish lawyers and leaders - those Jesus said are outside God's Kingdom and who tried to prevent others from going in.

Then Jesus speaks of those who hunger (again, not physical hunger, but spiritual hunger, as He said in the sermon on the mount). Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, who have an insatiable desire to be right with God and to live holy lives. We need to recognise that we cannot achieve that in our own strength and wisdom! The promise is we will be truly satisfied. The third speaks of those who weep (the parallel in Matthew 5 is those who mourn), and again that is not grief over lost loved ones but deep sadness over sin in our lives, and our inability to resist temptation and gain victory over sin in our own power. The promise is we will laugh. In the end when Jesus reigns victorious, when sin, death and the devil are all cast into outer darkness, our joy will so overflow that we will laugh at their demise.

Then Jesus turns to the reaction of the world towards those who follow Jesus. ‘Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man!’ That is the experience of so many Christians around the world, and  even here in the UK it is becoming more difficult to live as true Bible believing Christians. If we apply Bible teaching to areas of morality - abortion, sexual relationships, etc. we can find ourselves ‘cancelled’, and in future we too may be persecuted in the same ways as our brothers and sisters in China, North Korea, Pakistan, Myanmar, etc. Jesus promises that by God's blessing we can rejoice in that day, and leap for joy. Why? ‘for behold, your reward is great in heaven’ - yes God gives us much in this life, but the greatest is yet to come!

**Second**, let us consider Psalm 1, and the practices that lead to the blessing of God. Psalm 1 begins with 3 things to avoid if we want to be blessed by God. ‘Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers’. There is an obvious downward trend - walk, stand, sit - becoming increasingly immobile. One who follows wicked advice becomes one who stands with sinners, agreeing and supporting their sin. Then he becomes one who joins scoffers, sitting and laughing at those who try to obey God's law. This 3-fold activity is to be shunned if we want to know God's blessing. By contrast, there is just one foundational activity that helps us avoid a wrong way of life, and that is to ‘delight... in the law of Yahweh, and on His law meditate day and night’. I’m sure we all make a regular habit of reading the Bible, but I wonder, do we really delight in it? Do we approach the Word of God with excitement, expecting to hear God sharing the riches of His grace with us?

Or do we find the scriptures tedious, difficult, unyielding of anything that spurs us on in our walk with God? If that is our case we need to repent and ask God to give us a new hunger and thirst for His Word. Remember, we cannot hide our true feelings from God. ‘Yahweh knows the way of the righteous!’ (Jeremiah 17:6) All those who shun the ways of sin and delight to learn from God's Word are described as being like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers - Jeremiah says the same thing about the person who trusts God, ‘He is like a tree planted by water’ (v.8).

Remember what Jesus expects of his followers, ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.’ (John 15:5-8) Bearing fruit of loving, holy, Christ-like lives depends on how well we know God's will, and the kind of works He wants of us. The only way to discover that is to devote ourselves to reading God's Word.

**Third**, and finally, the prerequisite of blessing, and here we return to our key text, Jeremiah 17:7,  ‘Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, whose trust is Yahweh’. As we have already noted, God immediately follows that statement with ‘He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit’. This is in direct contrast to those who put their trust elsewhere, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from Yahweh. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.’ (vv.5-6) Why does that matter? Look at verse 10, ‘I Yahweh, search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.’ What is that, other than judgment, or recompense?

There IS judgment coming at the end of time (Hebrews 9:27). It’s appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment - no one can escape that. Paul says the same in 2 Corinthians 5:10,  ‘we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body’. John reports the same conclusion in Revelation 20:11-12, ‘Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.’ The basic problem of the unbeliever is that he, or she does NOT trust in Yahweh, and their heart turns away from Yahweh.

The human heart is, by nature, incapable of faith or obedience. ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt’ (Jeremiah 17:9). When God says, in verse 6, about the one who is without faith in God, ‘He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land’, that is a picture of eternal punishment that awaits those who don’t trust in Yahweh. Yes, in order to be blessed by God we must shun the way of sin and scoffing; we need to take delight in learning from the Word of God. But, at the very root of all the things we do, we must put our whole trust in God. ‘Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, whose trust is Yahweh’. Is that you? Amen!

**Pastoral Prayer**

Loving Father, as we come to know You more and love You more, we recognise our need of You more and more. Help us today to recognise all the rich blessings that are received by those who trust in Your Word and place their eternal hope in You. Help us to live by faith and not by sight, so that You become increasingly the focus of our hearts and joy of our lives. Develop in us that child-like trust in You that pleases Your Father-heart of love. We thank You, Lord, that in the midst of all life's difficulties and problem You are our Rock and our Redeemer. You are our Source and our Supply. Thank You that in Christ Jesus we have all we need to stand firm in this evil day. Thank You that Christ is our health, our strength and the stronghold of our lives. We pray that no matter what difficulties arise, may we draw all our hope and strength from You, so that we may stand fast in the evil day. May we each continue to live lives that honour You and bear much fruit to Your praise and glory. These things we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

**Benediction**

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. May the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all this day and forever more, amen.