Home Service Sheet For 25th July 2021

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:41-48

41 Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord,
   your salvation according to your promise;
42 then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me,
   for I trust in your word.
43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
   for my hope is in your rules.
44 I will keep your law continually,
   forever and ever,
45 and I shall walk in a wide place,
   for I have sought your precepts.
46 I will also speak of your testimonies before kings
   and shall not be put to shame,
47 for I find my delight in your commandments,
   which I love.
48 I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love,
   and I will meditate on your statutes.

Gracious and loving God, we come before You today with our worship and praise for You. Through Your Word You have revealed Yourself to us, showing us Your holiness and love, justice and mercy. In Your law You have shown us what perfect righteousness looks like, and in Your Son You have shown us how we might be made righteous because of what He did for us on the cross. Lord, we thank You and praise You for making us Your children in Christ, and for drawing us to Yourself. May You help us to listen attentively to Your Word today, so that we might gain wisdom and understanding by which to live our lives to Your praise and glory. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

Read or Sing Holy, holy, holy written by Reginald Heber
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmYfoN1Lywk>

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessèd Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessèd Trinity!

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 Galatians 5:16-24

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Last week we ended by briefly considering the disastrous impact of relying on our selves and our own deeds. In verse 15, Paul laid out the reality of such flesh-based living leading to destruction via a downward spiral of nastiness and hatred. So, assuming that we do not wish to follow that path of destruction, and we really shouldn’t, what is the alternative? Walking by the Spirit, but what does that mean, and what does it look like in action?

There is a battle going on inside each and every person – between what is good, and what is evil. As much as we might like to think that people are basically good and decent, the Bible clearly teaches us that we are all depraved sinners, whose natural instinct is to do wrong. When we become Christians, through faith in Christ, we all receive the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. He works to encourage and empower us to live godly lives, which are in opposition to our own natural, sinful, desires. Therefore this battle will continue to rage inside each and every one of us until either we pass from this world, or Jesus returns.

We are called to live in holiness as God’s people, but this side of glory we will not fully achieve that. We will continue to fall into temptation and sin, despite the guiding of the Spirit within us. Thankfully God is merciful, and will forgive us our sins providing we confess them to Him, asking for forgiveness, and repent of them (see 1 John 1:9). This brings us on to an area of Biblical teaching that, at first, can seem rather confusing. In verse 21 Paul writes, “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

We know that in Christ our sins are forgiven, and we are adopted into God’s family. We also know that because of Jesus’ death on the cross for us, we will live with Him for eternity if we have faith in Him. Yet here, and elsewhere in the New Testament, a list of sins is concluded with a statement such as, ‘they will not inherit the kingdom of God’. In other words, these people will not be forgiven and saved. How can this be? Are we truly saved by grace alone, or is a certain level of holiness also required of us?

Earlier in his letter to the Galatians, Paul has made it very clear that nothing is to be added to Christ’s sacrifice to bring about our salvation. So what does this mean? I think the key to this passage, and other similar ones, is that the sinful actions referred to are a course of action, not an occasional slip. Elsewhere Paul even turns the sins into descriptors of the people who commit them (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), for example, idolaters or liars. These are people who have allowed their sin to define who they are. They are not Christians who have fallen into temptation. We cannot be defined by our sin and be a true believer as this denies God His rightful lordship over our lives. As Jesus says about the love of money – “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and…” (Matthew 6:24). Do the Galatian believers, or for that matter do we, love and serve God, or do they love and serve their sin and their selfish desires?

Life in the Spirit is not at all like this, and can be seen through a very different kind of evidence than sin. Paul identifies for us the fruit of the Spirit. Note quickly that this is a singular fruit, not several different fruits. In other words this is a package deal of what we should be seeing in the life of a true believer. It’s not a case of having two or three of them, but not the others! Paul writes in verses 22 and 23, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” All true believers have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, working to produce this fruit in that person’s life.

As Christians these things should characterise us, and be evident in our lives. Again, Paul is not saying that Christians will perfectly demonstrate this fruit all the time, but He is saying that we should be producing more and more of this fruit as we grow and mature in Christ. Remember that we are not reconciled to God through our efforts or good deeds. Nevertheless, if our lives are not producing good fruit, there is something seriously wrong within us. In fact, if we are not producing the fruit of the Spirit it may indicate that we are not even in Christ at all, even though we have always attended church, and tried to live a good life. Going to church every Sunday, or living a basically moral life, doesn’t make anyone a Christian.

Becoming a Christian always happens by coming to faith in Jesus Christ, believing that He is the Son of God who died for you on the cross. Salvation is entirely God’s gracious gift to us, undeserved, and impossible to earn. Yet, when we come to God through faith in His Son, Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, and through His work within us we start to change, becoming more and more like Jesus. This is seen by us doing good deeds and serving God and others faithfully, and in love. Are you sure that you have placed your faith in Jesus? If not then please make this step into the Christian life today. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

Lord of all hope, fill our hearts with joy and peace today, knowing that You are faithful and sovereign over all things. We bring to You the needs of this world:
• Lord, hear our prayer for everyone to whom You have given the power and authority to rule over others. May each leader lead with wisdom and compassion, towards their subjects. May they seek the good of all, and strive for peace with others rather than strife and war.
• Lord, hear our prayer for all who continue to suffer as a result of Covid. We think of those seriously ill at home or in hospital. We pray for those who care for them too, and those who mourn also. We think of those who have lost employment as a result of lockdowns, and those struggling with depression and other concerns about their mental health.
• Lord, hear our prayer for the Church. We pray for all brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing persecution on account of their following You. We also pray for our local fellowships, asking that You would guide us in our thinking and decision making as we move forward under the leadership of Your Son, guided by Your Word.
• Lord, hear our prayer for ourselves. May we walk in love and obedience to You. May the Gospel enthuse our words and deeds every day. Grant us strength in weakness, guidance in confusion and courage when faced with trouble. In all things, may we live to Your praise and glory!
In the precious Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ we ask it, amen!

Blessing

Heavenly Father, I pray that Your love may shine forth in me. May Your peace and joy abide within me. Teach me to be patient and kind in all my dealings with others, and help me to demonstrate the goodness and grace in me that only comes from You. Lord, may I be gentle and self-controlled in my actions and attitudes. Loving God, I know that I cannot develop the fruit of Your Holy Spirit through my own effort or will, but only as I rely on Christ. Help me to abide in You I pray, amen.