Home Service Sheet for Sunday 25th August 2024

Call To Worship Isaiah 6:8-10

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” And he said, “Go, and say to this people:

“‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;

keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

Make the heart of this people dull,

    and their ears heavy,

    and blind their eyes;

lest they see with their eyes,

    and hear with their ears,

and understand with their hearts,

    and turn and be healed.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, our purpose in life is to glorify You. The commands You have given us in Your Word direct us to walk in Your ways. Please help us to pay attention to Your words and remember what is true. Lord, Your perfection and beauty are evident; Your holiness shines forth and gives light to all that is in darkness. You cannot even speak injustice from Your mouth, and You will not keep silent. Gracious God, there is no sacrifice we can make or offering we can present that will satisfy Your anger at our sin. There is nothing that hidden from You. Although we cannot offer a worthy sacrifice, we will humble ourselves before You in gratefulness for the One who did — Jesus Christ our Lord. We will give to You our love and obedience, and we will seek You in times of trouble and glorify You for saving us. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

Hymn A mighty fortress is our God by Martin Luther

<https://youtu.be/vyedsfF6hNk?si=Mt65ks4EBvqj7q0u>

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;

Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:

For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;

His craft and pow’r are great, and, armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,

Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God’s own choosing:

Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;

Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same, and He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us;

The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly pow’rs, no thanks to them, abideth;

The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth;

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;

The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.

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 Acts 28:11-28

After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, “Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar - though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.” And they said to him, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.”

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

“‘Go to this people, and say,

“You will indeed hear but never understand,

    and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

For this people's heart has grown dull,

    and with their ears they can barely hear,

    and their eyes they have closed;

lest they should see with their eyes

    and hear with their ears

and understand with their heart

    and turn, and I would heal them.’

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

Reflection

On the 13th of July this year, an attempt was made on the life of former US President, Donald Trump. Regardless of our politics, or views about Donald Trump, I’m sure we can all agree that this kind of thing should not happen. There is an interesting question that has been raised by some Christians considering this event, and that is ‘Did God intervene to save the life of Donald Trump?’ We know from the Bible (Romans 13:1), that rulers and authorities are put in place by God, whether for our good or in judgment for the wrongs that nations have done. Did God, therefore, step in and prevent the shooter from assassinating Trump? Let’s turn to our Bible reading now, that deals with this kind of question and helps us better understand the world and the role that God continues to play in it every single moment of every day.

Our reading today, from the last chapter of the book of Acts, tells us of the Apostle Paul’s eventual arrival in Rome after an horrific long journey there in Roman custody, which involved a shipwreck which, for three months, stranded all the crew and passengers on the island of Malta. What we can see very clearly from Luke’s account, in Acts chapters 27 and 28, is that this was all orchestrated by God to advance the spread of the Gospel. In other words, God was in control of all that happened from start to finish. After Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, he was given several opportunities to speak about the Gospel, as he was during the storm and shipwreck on the way to Rome.

Theologically, this is what is known as the sovereignty of God. In everyday language, God is in control of everything all the time. We see this throughout Scripture, and see that God uses all things to bring about good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28). We should notice how Paul never becomes worried or anxious when he seems to be in great danger or under arrest and heading to the most powerful human being of his day, the Roman emperor who had the ultimate (human) authority over life and death. Paul simply trusted God because he knew that the Lord was the One who was in control of everything.

We should also notice that Paul does not ask God to spare him the difficulties he went through on his journey to Rome. Rather, he is thankful to God for His divine plans and for being used by God to do His will. This, I believe, should suggest to us that God does not intervene in the various events of this world. If He did, this would suggest that God changes His mind and doesn’t know the future, despite what the Scriptures tell us to the contrary. Instead, this points us to God having everything already planned out in advance. If we understand and believe this it will give us great peace in our lives, knowing that God will always do what He has purposed to be the best overall.

On the way to Rome, and then in Rome itself, under house arrest, Paul has many opportunities to strengthen Christian brothers and speak with others about the Gospel. On the stricken boat he was able to point the panicking sailors to the Lord Jesus. Following his snakebite on the island of Malta he was able to proclaim that the Lord was his healer. In our reading, Paul was able to speak freely with fellow believers in Puteoli (v.13) and Rome (v.15). This is good and would have encouraged the believers in Italy, but the focus here is the opportunity that God had provided for Paul to speak to the Jews in Rome. The way that Luke lays it all out suggests that this has been God’s purpose from the beginning – to spread the Gospel message to the Jewish folk in Rome.

God had prepared the way for the Gospel message, so that when Paul “called together the local leaders of the Jews” (v.17) they accepted. They were not just willing to hear the message of Jesus, but actively wanted to hear it (v.22). The response was varied as it always is when the Gospel is proclaimed. Some were beginning to believe, while others rejected the message. Luke explains that this was in fulfilment of God’s message to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9-10). For this reason, the Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles (v.28). The Gospel brings salvation to all who hear and receive it with faith, but judgment against all who reject it. God brings about His purposes and plans with the ultimate purpose of bringing salvation to all who will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

Prayer of intercession

Loving God, we thank You for Paul who had such confidence and boldness to share those things concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that our lives would be lived in such a dedicated way to our Lord and Saviour. May the very cry of our hearts be: "To live is Christ and to die is gain." Keep on reminding us that You are in control of all things and that nothing that ever happens is a surprise to You. Help us to trust Your purposes and plans for us and the way in which You bring them about. We pray for those in positions of power and authority in our nation and throughout the world. May they also recognise that it is You who are in control and not they so that they might submit to Your wisdom and ways. In Jesus’ Name we ask this, amen.

Prayer of Blessing

Send us out, O Lord, in the power of Your Spirit to spread the good news of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. May our actions, attitudes and words all speak clearly and loudly of Him and be used of You to point people to the Gospel. This we ask in Jesus’ Name and to Your glory, amen.