**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 28th July 2024**

**Call To Worship Psalm 80:1-3**

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,

    you who lead Joseph like a flock.

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

    Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,

stir up your might

    and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;

    let your face shine, that we may be saved!

**Opening Prayer**

Almighty God, we give you thanks and praise because of who You are and all that You have done for us and for all Your people. In creation, You blessed us with all good gifts that we need not only to live but to thrive. In sending Your Son, You opened up the way of salvation and drew us into Your family. You, O Lord, are victorious over sin and death and we praise You for that. Help us to remember to turn to You in our times of difficulty and sorrow for hope is found in You alone. The glory, power, might and authority belong to You alone – hallelujah! Amen!

Hymn To God be the glory by Fanny Crosby

<https://youtu.be/xil1eXE-OKo?si=X8lhyKHplxApaAqi>

To God be the glory, great things He hath done, so loved He the world that He gave us His Son,

Who yielded His life our redemption to win, and opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear His voice;

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice;

Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,

And give Him the glory; great things He hath done.

Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, to every believer the promise of God;

The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,

And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;

But purer, and higher, and greater will be our wonder, our victory when Jesus we see.

**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 Joel 2:18-27**

Then the Lord became jealous for his land

    and had pity on his people.

The Lord answered and said to his people,

“Behold, I am sending to you

    grain, wine, and oil,

    and you will be satisfied;

and I will no more make you

    a reproach among the nations.

“I will remove the northerner far from you,

    and drive him into a parched and desolate land,

his vanguard into the eastern sea,

    and his rear guard into the western sea;

the stench and foul smell of him will rise,

    for he has done great things.

“Fear not, O land;

    be glad and rejoice,

    for the Lord has done great things!

Fear not, you beasts of the field,

    for the pastures of the wilderness are green;

the tree bears its fruit;

    the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

“Be glad, O children of Zion,

    and rejoice in the Lord your God,

for he has given the early rain for your vindication;

    he has poured down for you abundant rain,

    the early and the latter rain, as before.

“The threshing floors shall be full of grain;

    the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

I will restore to you the years

    that the swarming locust has eaten,

the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,

    my great army, which I sent among you.

“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,

    and praise the name of the Lord your God,

    who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,

    and that I am the Lord your God and there is none else.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

**Reflection**

Previously, the prophet Joel has spoken messages of God’s judgment upon His people Israel. There have been hints of God’s grace and mercy, but that is as far as it has gone up to this point. However, in our reading today we have a message of great hope and restoration. Verse 18 begins with the following words, “Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.” Why did God do this? Had God changed His mind? These are important questions for us to consider as they both speak to the character and nature of God.

Theologically, God is described as unchanging and unchangeable so how is it possible for God to seemingly change His mind? Firstly, let us consider this – has God been in control of everything that has happened to His people Israel so far? The clear answer to this is ‘yes’. God was the One who had seen and heard how His people had rejected Him and turned away from Him. It was also the Lord who had sent judgment upon the people through the foreign army, and it was the same Lord who called the people to cry out to Him. It was God who had now stopped this same army and was sending good crops to the land. God has been in control all the way through and has been putting His plans and purposes into action. In other words, God has not changed.

So, secondly why did God go from judging the people through an invasion to removing that invading force? Was it in response to the cries of the people? Verse 19 speaks of the Lord answering His people, in response to their crying out to Him, which God Himself had commanded them to do. Again, it is God who has caused all of this to happen according to His own purposes and plans. God has neither changed nor responded to the words or actions of others. Rather He has orchestrated circumstances from start to finish in order for His perfect will to be done.

God speaks of a time of restoration that He is bringing about for His people Israel. He will provide for them produce, crops and water. Perhaps even more importantly, though, He says this in verse 19, “I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.” In other words, other nations will no longer look at Israel and what has happened to them and be able to point and laugh. What happens to Israel reflects on their God, the One true and living God. God was about to put the record straight and restore His own reputation.

Historically God did bring restoration to the ancient people of Israel, but it was only for a period of time and not forever. It is, however, a foretaste of God’s greatest act of restoration that is still to come when He will create a new heaven and a new earth and will dwell with His people forever. Israel would sin against God again and reject Him and reject His Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, they condemned themselves to the judgment of God. In verse 20 God spells out the substance of this restoration. Not only will God provide food for His people, but He will also remove the foreign army and drive them far away.

Verse 20 ends with an interesting and significant phrase, “he has done great things”, which here refers to the foreign nation. Great is not always a good thing - it’s an indicator of something being impressive or done on a grand scale. The destruction wrought upon Israel had been great in that it had been widespread and severe. There is a contrast found in the following verse, though, that is to be a cause of happiness for Israel. The Lord tells them to “be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!” The great things that God has done involve the removal of the foreign oppressors and the restoration of Israel and its land. In bringing His people up out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, God had previously done ‘great things’ and bared His holy arm. In sending His Son, the Lord Jesus, to die for us He has done the greatest thing ever. God is mighty and powerful and with Him nothing is impossible! Amen!

**Prayer**

Gracious God, we thank You for Your Word and for the message of restoration that You gave to the prophet Joel. Help us today to remember that You are in control of all things and that nothing can happen to us without Your knowledge. We pray for Your Church throughout the world and ask that You would continue to build it, strengthen it and help it to grow in maturity, love and size. We pray for this world and its peoples that they may recognise the great and mighty deeds that You have done in and through Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Draw people to Yourself in faith and love for You and for one another. These things we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

**Blessing**

O Lord, our God, be with us now to strengthen us; about us, to keep us; above us, to protect us; beneath us, to uphold us; before us, to direct us; behind us, to keep us from straying; and round about us, to defend us. Blessed are You, O Father, forever and ever, amen.