Home Service Sheet for 19th February 2023

Call To Worship Psalm 119:33-40

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes;

 and I will keep it to the end.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law

 and observe it with my whole heart.

Lead me in the path of your commandments,

 for I delight in it.

Incline my heart to your testimonies,

 and not to selfish gain!

Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;

 and give me life in your ways.

Confirm to your servant your promise,

 that you may be feared.

Turn away the reproach that I dread,

 for your rules are good.

Behold, I long for your precepts;

 in your righteousness give me life!

Prayer

Loving Lord, to You belongs all the praise, all the glory and all the majesty. Nothing in this world is as worthy of our devotion and attention. Help us today to turn our eyes to Your Son, the Lord Jesus, as we read of all He has done for us in Your Word. Grant to us the understanding that Your Holy Spirit brings to us, and help us to live out that truth in our lives. Remind us of Your grace and mercy towards us and fill our hearts with praise to You. We ask this in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Hymn The Church’s One Foundation by Samuel John Stone

https://youtu.be/w1YBYrJ8Hzg

The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;

She is His new creation by water and the Word:

From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride;

With His own blood He bought her and for her life He died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o’er all the earth,

Her charter of salvation - one Lord, one faith, one birth;

One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,

And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.

‘Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war,

She waits the consummation of peace forevermore;

Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,

And the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,

And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won;

O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we,

 Like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with Thee.

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 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw - 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Reflection

In 1 Corinthians 3:9 Paul described us, the Church, as “God’s building”, and our reading today follows on in a similar way, expanding on that description. Building a house, or even a wall, requires a good, solid foundation. I only have one experience of building, and that involved laying a low wall of bricks inside a greenhouse to grow some tomato plants. Instead of digging out a trench or something to lay a foundation I instead just started laying down bricks on the concrete floor, using cement to attach them. At most the wall lasted four or five years and it took no real effort to dismantle. That’s because it didn’t have a solid foundation – in fact, it had no foundation whatsoever! Clearly that is not how we should build any kind of structure!

Paul, however, is not talking about actual construction, but rather the building up of believers and God’s Church in maturity. In order for someone’s faith in Christ to endure and grow it needs to have a solid foundation built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed to us in the Word of God. Any other foundation is like shifting sand that cannot be trusted or relied upon (Matthew 7:24-27). In fact, Paul writes that no other foundation can be laid for the Christian faith. He goes on to speak of what is then built on that foundation, offering a range of different materials – “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw” (v.12). This points us towards the reality that we are all different, and in the Church have different roles and functions to play.

Nonetheless, each of us needs to be able to withstand testing with fire. The image of fire speaks of two possible things that every Christian will face in their life. One is persecution because the world hates Jesus and all who follow Him, and the other is the process of being made holy by God. This is likened elsewhere in Scripture to metal being refined (Malachi 3:3). In order for metal to be completely pure it must be heated up to high temperature in order to get rid of all the impurities which have different, usually lower, melting points. God promises that we will all face persecution, and if we are truly following Jesus then we will also be purified. Both of these processes are both painful and necessary, and through them we will be made more like Jesus.

As we help each other to grow and mature in faith we are being built up on the foundation that has been laid by God – His Son, Jesus Christ. Those who are faithful shepherds will do good work, carefully teaching the Scriptures so that those in their care will grow and be ready to face whatever trials may come their way. Paul believed that God had enabled him to be like this through the work of His Holy Spirit within him, and certainly the evidence we find in Scripture and history would support this. Similarly we find a good record of continued growth and maturity of faith pointing back towards the Reformation under godly leaders like Martin Luther and John Calvin. These men were not perfect, but they were powerfully used by God to build others up in their faith.

Sadly, others do not have good workmanship to show for their efforts. Those who undermine the truth of Scripture and question the Gospel usually leave a trail of ship-wrecked faith and moral disasters. Our reading today makes it clear that they will face a reckoning when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. If their own faith is built upon the sure foundation of Jesus Christ they will ultimately be saved, but only after a great deal of purification with the fire of God’s judgment. How will we be judged for the way that we have taught the faith? Will the works that we have encouraged to be built in others pass the test of God’s final judgment? My prayer is that they will, and if we have been faithfully handling God’s Word then we have nothing to worry about.

Paul concludes this section with a reminder that we are God’s Temple, in whom dwells the Holy Spirit. This is true for us as individuals, and collectively as God’s Church. Jesus loves the Church (Ephesians 5:25), and those who oppose and try to destroy His Church will ultimately face His wrath and judgment. We are called to be holy and that is what we should be encouraging one another to become more and more. If it helps, holiness is more about being like Jesus than it is about not doing certain things. Both are true, but the positive attributes of holiness are the ones that I believe it is better to focus upon. Let us then seek to be holy and help one another to grow in faith, love and holiness to the glory of God! Amen!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You for Your amazing plan of salvation. Thank You that Your dearly loved Son laid aside His glory to become a man so that He could give up His sinless life and bring many to glory - by faith in Him. Thank You that Jesus is the Rock of our salvation and the Foundation Stone upon which our faith is founded. Keep us looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Teach us, we pray, to walk in spirit and truth and to live as spiritual sons and daughters, and not as carnal Christians. Teach us to live our lives as unto You. May our sinful desires remain nailed to the Cross, and may our new life in Christ do only those things that are honouring to You. This we ask in the Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, amen.

Benediction

Lord Jesus Christ, You are our firm foundation. Help us build on this sure and solid foundation as we seek to follow You all our days. May the light of the Gospel shine in and through us every day that others may be drawn to Your love, grace and mercy. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.