**Home Service Sheet 21st May 2023**

**Call To Worship                 Psalm 68:32-35**

O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
    sing praises to the Lord, *Selah \**
to him who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens;
    behold, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.
Ascribe power to God,
    whose majesty is over Israel,
    and whose power is in the skies.
Awesome is God from hissanctuary;
    the God of Israel - he is the one who gives power and strength to his people.
Blessed be God!

**Opening Prayer**

Ascribe greatness to our God, the Rock, the foundation on whom alone our salvation is built. Almighty and awesome God we come to You today recognising Your power and strength, and thanking and praising You for making Yourself known to us. You deserve the praise of all creation, nations, rulers, animals, plants and even rocks. You rule and reign over the whole of creation, and nothing was created that was not made by You! Be enthroned on our praises this day, and help us to see You as You truly are – holy, merciful, loving, just and gracious. To You, O Lord, belongs all the praise and glory, amen!

**Hymn                                     ‘Forward!’ Be our Watchword**by ***Henry Alford***

<https://youtu.be/N_AtOahqWS4>

‘Forward!’ be our watchword, steps and voices joined;

Seek the things before us, not a look behind:

See the fiery pillar at our army’s head;

Who shall dream of shrinking by our Saviour led?

Forward through the desert, through the toil and fight:

Jordan flows before us, Zion beams with light.

Forward, flock of Jesus, salt of all the earth,

Till each yearning purpose springs to glorious birth:

Take the Word of mercy, work while it is day:

Spread through all the nations Love’s redeeming ray;

Lead them out of error, by the Spirit’s might;

Urge them from their darkness forward into light.

Glory upon glory has our God prepared,

For the souls that love Him one day to be shared:

Eye has not beheld them, ear has never heard,

Nor of them has uttered thought or speech a word:

But in future glory, where the heavens are bright,

Shall the veil be lifted and our faith be sight.

Over yon horizon, rise the City’s towers,

Where our God abideth − that fair home is ours!

Shining walls of jasper, streets of crystal gold,

And, of life, a river shedding joys untold!

Press, then, onward thither, in the Spirit’s might,

Pilgrims, to your country − forward into light!

**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 17:1-15**

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.But the Jewswere jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

The brothersimmediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

**Reflection**

The apostle Paul writes in his letter to the church in Rome, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17) Here, Paul is showing us his normal approach to evangelism (proclaiming the good news of Jesus). First he would preach to Jews, and then to Gentiles. We saw this pattern in Athens, and again today in both Thessalonica and Berea. Both towns must have had at least 12 Jewish men as they had synagogues, unlike the town of Philippi, mentioned in the previous chapter of Acts.

In our reading we hear about Paul spending three Sabbaths proclaiming Jesus to be the Messiah in the synagogue at Thessalonica. It was the tradition at that time for visiting rabbis to be extended the opportunity to preach at any synagogue they might be visiting. His message to the Jews is summarised as “this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ”, which he showed them from the Scriptures. I think that it is important for us to note that Paul used the Old Testament to point people to Jesus. These were the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people (and still are today), and they speak often of God’s promised Messiah, Jesus. In fact, we do well to recognise that our Christian faith is God’s intended result and fulfilment of the Old Testament.

Some of the Jewish people were convinced by Paul’s preaching and came to believe that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah for whom they had been waiting. Luke also mentions that a number of god-fearing Gentile men and women also believed. From the earliest days of the Church it was clear that the Gospel was not just for the Jews, but rather for all who would live by faith. The Old Testament spoke of Israel (God’s people) being a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 60:3), and so this was beginning to be fulfilled through the preaching and teaching of the early Jewish believers in Jesus. Paul also continued to preach the Gospel in Berea, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Note how the Berean Jews are described, as “more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (v.11) They are held out in Acts as faithful Jews who listened to the Gospel message as God intended for them to do. They also checked what Paul said against the Scriptures, and this is a wonderful example for us to follow too. Whenever someone says things about God or the Gospel we must be sure that it is right, and the way to check this out is to compare it to what God has already said in His Word, because God will never contradict Himself!

Sadly, though, not all of the Jews in Northern Greece were so noble. In fact, we are told that some of the Jews in Thessalonica were very unhappy with Paul and his companions preaching the Gospel. They certainly didn’t want people responding to the message with faith and becoming disciples of Jesus. They got together a crowd of trouble makers, initially looking for Paul, but when they couldn’t find him they dragged several believers out of their houses and brought them before the town officials. They complained that these men were causing an uproar in Thessalonica and proclaiming another king, Jesus, instead of the emperor. This sounds very similar to what the chief priests and elders of Jerusalem said about Jesus when they arrested Him! Ironically they should have accepted that God was the true King over all in the first place, and looking at our Bible reading we will also note that they are the ones causing uproar!

The main issue that the Jews of Thessalonica had with Paul and the Gospel message was a religious one, but in order to get their own way they described it in loaded, political terms instead. The Jews here fail to recognise or accept the truth of the Gospel and use lies to get their will done by the authorities. Proclaiming the Gospel is both essential and dangerous. We need to be aware that God has shown us in His Word that being faithful to Him will bring us persecution. The Gospel forces us to recognise that we are not in charge and, in fact, we need rescuing from our sin and ourselves by God. This message is offensive to human pride and we should expect there to be consequences when we share the good news of Jesus.

In our Bible reading we see the believers concern for and care of Paul and his companions. They send them on to the town of Berea so that they would be out of harm’s way. However, later, we read that the Thessalonian Jews went on to cause trouble in Berea also. Opposition to the Gospel was something we see often in the New Testament, and in the world today. We have had a period of relative ease and stability in this country for the past two or three hundred years, but the signs are there that this is changing. We need God’s strength to remain faithful, and He promises to always be with us by His Spirit. Let us rely on Him and His strength, rather than our own, that we might remain faithful to our Lord, whatever the consequences might be for us. Amen!

**Prayer**

Gracious God, in Your Word we read about how the Gospel was spread through the preaching of the apostles throughout the known world. We thank You for those who continue to faithfully proclaim the message of Jesus. Help us all to do our part in the spread of the Gospel, and grant us courage and boldness in the face of criticism, ridicule, opposition and persecution. We pray for those who continue to proclaim the Good News even though they know their very lives are in danger. Grant them strength and comfort in knowing that they are Your faithful servants. Loving Father, thank You also for Your Word of truth and all that it contains. Help us to be good stewards of the Scriptures as we search their pages daily. Teach us all that You would have us learn, and guide us into all truth, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

**Benediction**

May the God who shakes heaven and earth, whose Spirit blows through the valleys and the hills; whose Son death could not contain and who lives to bring us into life everlasting; bless us with the power to endure, to hope and to share the Gospel in truth and with love. This we ask in the Name of Jesus, amen.

**Endnote \***

***Selah***is a Hebrew word that we find repeated throughout the Psalms. We are not certain what it means, but it is likely to mean something like rest, or pause, with the idea of thinking about what we’ve just read or heard.