**Home Service Sheet Sunday 25th February 2024**

**Call To Worship                  Psalm 22:22-28**

I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
    in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:  
You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
    All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,  
    and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
For he has not despised or abhorred  
    the affliction of the afflicted,  
and he has not hidden his face from him,  
    but has heard, when he cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
    my vows I will perform before those who fear him.  
The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;  
    those who seek him shall praise the Lord!  
    May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember  
    and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
    shall worship before you.  
For kingship belongs to the Lord,  
    and he rules over the nations.

**Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, You are the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. You are the Creator of all good things and our Counselor, guiding us through Your Word to make wise decisions. You are our Comforter in times of sorrow, pain, or distress. We praise You for drawing near to us and always gracing us with Your presence. Accept our praise and thanksgiving today, for we offer it in Jesus’ Name, amen.

**Hymn                                     Man of sorrows**by ***Philip Bliss***

<https://youtu.be/WzOkVtXPdGk?si=u5XPeNtJOmggJaKZ>

“Man of Sorrows!” what a name for the Son of God, who came

Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood –

Sealed my pardon with His blood; Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He;

Full atonement! can it be? Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Lifted up was He to die, “It is finished!” was His cry;

Now in heaven exalted high: Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

When He comes, our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring,

Then anew this song we’ll sing: Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

**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                     Mark 8:31-38**

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his lifewill lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**Reflection**

We all tend to live with a number of expectations and assumptions about the world. Some of them are influenced by our own experiences and others by what we have learned and read. For example, we generally expect tomatoes to be red and pears to be green. We also assume that the temperature outside will be warmer in Summer than it is in Winter. That’s just how it is most of the time, but that doesn’t mean that it always will be that way. Tomatoes can be green or yellow, pears can be red and some Summer days can be colder than some Winter days.

In the First Century A.D., Jewish people had a clear expectation of what the Messiah would be like and what he would do. Much of their expectations were based upon reading the Scriptures in a way that was heavily influenced by the Jewish leaders of their day. They understood that the Messiah would come to save them, but they imagined this would be from their physical enemies of Rome, rather than their spiritual and eternal enemies of sin, death and hell. Jesus certainly didn’t fit the mould that they had created in their own minds of what the Messiah would look like. With this in mind we can understand why Peter reacted the way that he did to Jesus’ words about His forthcoming suffering and death.

There’s just something about how Peter is described taking Jesus aside and starting to rebuke him that seems both ridiculous and offensive. How could one of Jesus’ disciples, who was being taught by Him, get it so wrong? How could Peter have thought he knew better than the very Son of God? Jesus refers to Peter as ‘Satan’, although perhaps we need to understand that this can simply mean an opposer or accuser in Hebrew. Jesus gets to the very heart of the problem and says, “you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Peter had looked at his world and made up his own mind as to what was the best solution to its problems.

Humanly speaking, God’s plan of salvation seems both unexpected and unlikely to succeed. However, God knows everything from before time began through to eternity. Nothing ever comes as a surprise to God and because of this His plans are perfect and turn out exactly as God intends them to do. Sometimes Christians today get into all kinds of trouble because they are more focused on the things of this world rather than the things of God. From a human perspective a church should be growing, have plenty of money in the bank and seek to win favour with people. God’s blueprint for His Church, though is rather different – faithful preaching of His Word, ongoing discipleship of His people and speaking the truth in love regardless of what other people might think!

Jesus goes on to turn His attention to the gathered crowd in verse 34, where He begins to teach about the cost of following Him. Most folk want an easy life with plenty of creature comforts and the basic respect of everyone around them. Jesus’ vision is very different! “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.For whoever would save his lifewill lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.” (vv.34-35) There is nothing easy or comfortable about the Christian life. Neither is it possible to follow Jesus and still prioritise the things of this world like wealth and influence. In fact, Jesus says that we are to ‘take up’ our ‘cross’, which means suffering and hardship. The Christian life is one that requires full commitment all the time.

In case we were in any doubt of the consequences of not following Jesus, this I spelled out for us in verse 38. Jesus said, “whoever is ashamed of me and of my words…, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father”. (v.38) If we fail to stand up and be counted, obeying Jesus’ words and living them out, then we will not receive eternal life. As the Apostle James wrote in his letter, “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). Faith in Jesus is not something that can be hidden, but rather makes itself known through every area of our lives. May we not be found wanting in commitment when Jesus returns. Amen!

**Prayer**

Gracious God, we thank You for Your Word and for all that You teach us from its pages. We thank You that Jesus calls us to follow Him and live our lives with our minds fixed on the things of God. We acknowledge that we often fail to live our life according to these perfect standards and ask for Your forgiveness and help to change. Transform us through the renewing of our minds that we may increasingly be focused on You rather than the things of this life. We pray too for Your Church throughout the world, asking that You would empower her to remain faithful to Your Word despite the constant pressures she faces from the world around. Help Your people to be bold in proclaiming the truth that others may hear Your call to follow Jesus. This we ask in His Name, amen.

**Benediction**

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify us completely and may our whole spirits and souls and bodies be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!