Home Service Sheet for Sunday 29th January 2023

Call To Worship: Psalm 15:1-5

O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent?

 Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

He who walks blamelessly and does what is right

 and speaks truth in his heart;

who does not slander with his tongue

 and does no evil to his neighbour,

 nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

in whose eyes a vile person is despised,

 but who honours those who fear the Lord;

who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

who does not put out his money at interest

 and does not take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things shall never be moved.

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, as we read the Psalm we are reminded that none of us are without fault and pure. Rather, we each rely upon Your grace and mercy towards us, and the forgiveness bought with the previous blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Only He is worthy to stand in Your presence. Only He was without sin and full of justice and righteousness. Father, draw us closer to You today in faith and love. Help us to worship You through obedience to Your Word and by doing the good works that You have prepared for us to do in Christ Jesus. Grant us understanding as we read Your Word and help us to be satisfied with all that You have given us through Your Son. In His glorious Name we pray, amen.

Hymn Immortal, invisible, God only wise by Walter C Smith

https://youtu.be/DD2e2N9Nvbk

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,

In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

Most blessed most glorious, the Ancient of Days,

Almighty, victorious − Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,

Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;

Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above

Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest − to both great and small;

In all life Thou livest − the true life of all;

We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,

And wither and perish − but naught changest Thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,

Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;

All praise we would render − O help us to see

‘Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee!

The Lord’s Pr18-3

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 1:18-31

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Reflection

We seem to be living in a world that largely lacks wisdom these days. Basic, foundational truths are rejected as being discriminatory (2+2=4 is racist, apparently) and simple biological facts are dismissed as social constructs. It seems all too much like the so-called wisdom seen in HanS Christian Andersen’s tale of the Emperor’s New Clothes! All too many people are afraid to state the obvious in case they are called out for doing so by others. What are we to do, and where should we be looking for the solid foundation on which to build our lives in the here and now? Like Luther and Calvin, let us look to the sure foundation found in the Word of God (sola scriptura)!

Paul begins this passage of Scripture by contrasting the reactions of wise and foolish people to the message of the cross. Without godly insight and faith the cross is seen as foolish, or a picture of defeat and death. However, to those who are wise, and have received the Spirit’s gift of faith, it is “the power of God”. In our natural state as human beings we are dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1), and we have no hope for the future. We deserve to be judged as guilty of sin and condemned to hell for that. Yet the message of the cross is that the one perfect Man, Jesus Christ, died for us and paid the price for our sin. As a result of God’s grace and by faith we are saved, and our sins are forgiven. This is the power of God in action for our salvation.

Over the next few verses Paul writes about human ‘wisdom’, and yet wherever he looks he is unable to find it. Human wisdom is like a desert oasis that appears to be there, but on closer inspection turns out to be nothing more than a mirage. Our wishful thinking believes it can see human wisdom, but the reality is simply foolishness. Not only that, but God cannot be found through human reasoning. For this very reason many of the so-called greatest minds of our times have been atheists, like Stephen Hawking and Richard Dawkins. They have been blinded by their pride and arrogance to the God who reveals Himself through His Word and the ‘foolish’ preaching of it by Christians.

The wisdom of God is only recognised as wisdom by those who believe in Jesus Christ (v.21). Paul also makes it clear that faith in Christ and, by extension, recognising God’s wisdom are both gifts from God, and not human actions. Rather we are called by God to faith, and through heeding that call we receive the God’s wisdom of salvation. We are not called because of anything good or special about us, because the only thing we can contribute to our salvation is the sin which makes it necessary. Paul put it like this, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise” (v.27).

In God’s Kingdom many of the standards and ways of this world are turned upside down. No longer are wise and influential people revered and celebrated, but rather the glory goes to God who has called the humble, lowly and foolish of this world to follow Him. It is through their transformation in Christ that God’s amazing grace and power is demonstrated. There is literally nothing that we have done, or can do, that we can boast about. The only One in whose actions we can boast is God in Jesus Christ. It is only because of what He did for us that we can enjoy eternal life. It is only because of Him that God’s wise way of salvation is revealed to us.

Paul goes on to conclude this section by writing that Jesus “became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (v.30). What does he mean by this? Wisdom is the knowledge and understanding that salvation only comes by the gift of God and not by human effort. Jesus became our righteousness by dying as the perfect Lamb of God on the cross in our place. He took our sin upon Himself and we receive His righteousness and holiness by faith. By accepting God’s gifts to us of wisdom, faith and righteousness we also receive redemption. The price has been paid for our sin and we are bought for God to be His children by faith. The world fails to see this as wisdom because they have not received His gift of faith. May we be thankful for all God’s gifts to us in Christ and may we rely on His wisdom being revealed in our foolishness, rather than any human wisdom we might think we have! Amen!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that in Your wisdom, You have shown all humanity’s self-proclaimed ‘wisdom’ and self-confidence to be worthless. This You did by sending the Lord Jesus to die on the Cross and rise again on the third day, proclaiming faith in Him alone to be the one and only way to salvation. Keep us looking to Jesus and living humbly before You all the days of our lives. Help us to be faithful in telling others the message of the cross, not through any skill of our own, but rather through reliance on Your Spirit and the wisdom that He gives to us. May You be glorified in and through us, we pray in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Benediction

Gracious God we thank You again for Your wondrous gift of salvation in and through Your Son, Jesus Christ alone. Send us out with hope, courage and love to keep on sharing the good news of the Gospel in our speech and in our actions. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.