Home Service Sheet for Sunday 7th July 2024

Call To Worship Galatians 3: 25-29

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, You are truly amazing in all Your ways and far beyond the grasp of our human understanding. Your offer of salvation is made to all who will believe in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ

Hymn By Faith by Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty and Stuart Townend

<https://youtu.be/A5y4L6kmHJc?si=a83dEqJhGtGin2dL>

By faith we see the hand of God in the light of creation’s grand design.

In the lives of those who prove His faithfulness, who walk by faith and not by sight.

We will stand as children of the promise; we will fix our eyes on Him, our soul’s reward;

Till the race is finished and the work is done. We’ll walk by faith and not by sight.

By faith our fathers roamed the earth, with the power of His promise in their hearts,

Of a holy city built by God’s own hand, a place where peace and justice reign.

By faith the prophets saw a day when the longed-for Messiah would appear,

With the power to break the chains of sin and death and rise triumphant from the grave.

By faith the church was called to go in the power of the Spirit to the lost.

To deliver captives and to preach good news in every corner of the earth.

By faith this mountain shall be moved, and the power of the gospel shall prevail;

For we know in Christ all things are possible for all who call upon His name.

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 2:12-17

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,

    “return to me with all your heart,

with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

    and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the Lord your God,

    for he is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

    and he relents over disaster.

Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,

    and leave a blessing behind him,

a grain offering and a drink offering

    for the Lord your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion;

    consecrate a fast;

call a solemn assembly;

    gather the people.

Consecrate the congregation;

    assemble the elders;

gather the children,

    even nursing infants.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,

    and the bride her chamber.

Between the vestibule and the altar

    let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep

and say, “Spare your people, O Lord,

    and make not your heritage a reproach,

    a byword among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples,

    ‘Where is their God?’”

Reflection

Recently, when we were thinking about the earlier part of Joel chapter 2, we heard about God’s judgment upon His people through a foreign military power. Their impact upon the land, its crops and the people would be devastating and in verse 11 we are called upon to consider who could endure such punishment and destruction. Thankfully that is not the end of the message that God gave to the prophet Joel for the people of Judah. In verse 15 there is a call to ‘blow the trumpet in Zion’. Unlike the similar call in verse 1 of chapter 2, it is a call to prayer and repentance. The first trumpet call was one of hopelessness, but the second is one of hope.

Previously, we were reminded that even though we cannot stand before God’s throne because of our own actions, we can stand with confidence because of what Jesus did for us. In our reading today, God graciously promised His people forgiveness if they would only call out to Him. They are to reach out to God not through outward appearance in sackcloth and ashes, but rather through a change of heart. In verse 13 God says, “rend your hearts and not your garments”. In other words, inner reality is what truly matters to God rather than outer appearance. It is relatively easy to tear your clothes but not really mean anything internally.

The Scriptures tell us elsewhere, “the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7) The context here is of Samuel being instructed by God to anoint the next king of Israel to follow Saul. David was not an impressive looking man, but on the inside, he was just who God was looking for. How we look, or what other people may think about us based on what we do is not as important as what we are truly like inside. Only God knows exactly what we are like inside and it is there that He calls us to repent and change.

In verse 13 of our reading, God reveals something of His own character. This is what we read, “he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” A common misunderstanding of our God is that the Old Testament reveals Him to be angry and cruel, but the New Testament gives us a different picture. This is simply not true, though! The Lord is consistent and reveals Himself to be the same in both the Old and New Testaments. God revealed Himself to be gracious, merciful and loving to Moses and many other key people in the Old Testament, just as He did through His Son in the New Testament.

There are two other important things to note about this reading. Firstly, this message was for all the people of Judah, from infants to the elderly, male and female. This call to repentance was to be heeded by all people, regardless of what else they were doing. Newlyweds are even commanded to join the solemn assembly before the Lord. This is perhaps a similar idea to that found in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, where the Holy Spirit inspired him to write that in Christ Jesus we are all one, regardless of our sex, nationality or social status. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) All people are to come to God individually for salvation because salvation is open to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, what happens to God’s people will influence what other people think about the very character of God. In verse 17, the priests are given the following words to speak to God, “Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations.” In other words, surrounding nations would draw their own conclusions about what God is like based upon what happened to His people. Reading between the lines we could compare this to Gospel witness. People will make up their own minds about God based upon what they see us, His people, doing. Even in the midst of suffering and hardship, though, God is with His people, and often it is through our responses to trouble that others may come to faith in Jesus. God must be real, they think, as we face hardship with contentment in God. So, to answer the question from verse 17, “Where is their God?”, He is with His people in the midst of their troubles suffering with them. Amen!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the book of Joel which bears witness to Your goodness and grace to all who will trust in Your Word. Teach each of us the lessons that You would have us learn from Israel’s history and keep us from making the same mistakes. Help us to make our actions a demonstration of a changed inner life which trusts You in thought, word, deed, and motive. This we ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Blessing

May the love of God go with us, the salvation we have in Jesus sustain us and the contentment we have in the Spirit be known to us this day and forevermore, amen.