

22nd October 2023 – Morning Service

Andy Haynes

Call to Worship - Psalm 99 v 20 – 21

Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word. Praise the Lord, all His heavenly hosts, you His servants who do His will.

Let us share with the heavenly hosts now as we praise God with our first hymn:-

StF 39 – Angel voices ever singing

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| 1) Angel voices, ever singing
Round thy throne of light,
Angel harps, for ever ringing,
Rest not day nor night;
Thousands only live to bless thee,
And confess thee Lord of might. | 4) In thy house, great God, we offer
Of thine own to thee
And for thine acceptance proffer,
All unworthily,
Hearts and minds and hands and voices,
In our choicest Psalmody. |
| 2) Thou who art beyond the farthest
Mortal eye can scan,
Can it be that thou regardest
Sinful woman, man?
Can we know that thou art near us
And wilt hear us? Yea, we can. | 5) Honour, glory, might, and merit
Thine shall ever be,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Blessed Trinity;
Of the best that thou hast given
Earth and heaven Render thee. |
| 3) Lord, we know that thou rejoices o'er each work of thine;
Thou didst ears and hands and voices for thy praise design;
Maker's art and music's measure for thy pleasure all combine. | |

Francis Pott

Prayer of Adoration

Dear Lord God, please help us this morning to be sincere in our act of worship, to genuinely seek Your presence as we gather together in Your name, to praise and adore You for Your unfailing goodness and mercy, and to give You thanks for the wonder of creation and the beauty we see in all that Your hand hath made. So let us lift our hearts in true love as we glorify Your name, recognising Your greatness, Your might and power, Your everlasting promises, Your faithfulness and amazing grace towards those who call upon the name of the Lord. For nothing can be compared to You, You are above all else, the alpha and omega, all glory and honour belong to our God. You are Holy and righteous and rule with justice and authority, help us to acknowledge who it is we fall before in prayer and adoration this morning. We thank You for all that You have provided for us, we thank You for Your word, the Holy Bible with its teachings and examples to aid us and guide us through life's rich pathway of ups and downs. But we thank You for Your greatest gift to us, the gift of Your Son, the Lord Jesus, in whom we find forgiveness and reconciliation following our confession and repentance. Such wonderful love poured out to a fallen world, that whosoever believes in Him should have everlasting life because He was willing to pay the price of our sin, that we may know salvation in Jesu's name. Jesus, who lived as one of us, teaching us by His word and example, who died that we might live. We say together now, the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples:

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 who 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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Our 2nd hymn is one of trust and resting in God's presence:-

StF 519 – Father I place into your hands

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| 1) Father, I place into Your hands
The things I cannot do.
Father, I place into Your hands
The things that I've been through.
Father, I place into Your hands
The way that I should go,
For I know I always can trust You. | 3) Father, we love to see Your face,
We love to hear Your voice,
Father, we love to sing Your praise
And in Your name rejoice,
Father, we love to walk with You
And in Your presence rest,
For we know we always can trust You. |
| 2) Father, I place into Your hands
My friends and family.
Father, I place into Your hands
The things that trouble me.
Father, I place into Your hands
The person I would be,
For I know I always can trust You. | 4) Father, I want to be with You
And do the things You do.
Father, I want to speak the words
That You are speaking too.
Father, I want to love the ones
That You will draw to You,
For I know that I am one with You. |

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Reading: Matthew 22 : 15 – 22

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Our next hymn speaks of genuine praise for God; verse 5 says 'so shalt thou, gracious Lord, from me receive the glory due':-

StF 73 – Fill thou my life

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| 1) Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and thy ways. | 3) Praise in the common things of life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean. |
| 2) Not for the lip of praise alone
Nor e'en the praising heart
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part: | 4) Fill every part of me with praise;
Let all my being speak
Of thee and of thy love, O Lord,
Poor though I be and weak. |

5) So shalt thou, gracious Lord, from me
Receive the glory due;
And so shall I begin on earth
The song for ever new.

6) So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free;
But all my life, in every step,
Be fellowship with thee.

Horatius N Bonar

Sermon

A man walked in on his wife who was singing in the kitchen. Surprised, he said to her "I thought that was the radio playing." "Flattery will get you nowhere," she said. "But thanks for coming in to listen." "I haven't" he replied, "I've come to turn it off!"

And in our bible reading for today we find that two groups who don't usually get on with each other, have joined forces in their shared dislike of Jesus. Matthew tells us that they had plans to trap Him into either speaking out against Ceasar and Roman rule, or alienate God's own people, the Jews, by answering their question about taxes. But before they ask Jesus the question, they lure Him into conversation using blatant flattery. Just listen to what these associates of the Pharisees and Herodians say in Matt 22 v 16:-

"Teacher, we know that You are a man of integrity, and that You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.... "

Amazing isn't it? They are spot on in what they say, and it's complimentary. So why don't they believe it? Why aren't they followers of Jesus if they know this to be true. Why do they stick with the false teachings of the Pharisees and follow the pagan King Herod whose power was Rome dependant. What hypocrites they are! How false can they be? But it's all in an effort to win Him over so they can pose their question and catch Him out, to slip Him up as He gives His answer.

Note how Matthew tells us it was not the Pharisees themselves that spoke to Jesus, but their disciples with the Herodians. Further proof that they wanted to trap Him, for they knew they were too well known to fool Jesus themselves due to the number of times they had openly criticized Him for His actions and teachings. On each occasion Jesus had dealt with them firmly and successfully of course, so this time they send those He is not so familiar with, and they are well rehearsed in their speech. And they've not finished yet, for verse 16 goes on *"You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are."* What they are doing here is giving Jesus licence to speak out, implying they won't be shocked or horrified at what He says, to just say what's on His mind, so that they can quickly catch Him out with their well-prepared question which they lose no time in asking in verse 17:-

"Tell us then, what is Your opinion? Is it right to pay the poll tax to Caesar or not?"

It's a simple 'yes' or 'no' question. Easy. Now they've got Him. If Jesus answers 'Yes' it would upset the Jews, so when He firmly answers 'No' they can swiftly report Him! But Jesus is not fooled by their flattery. In fact Jesus knows everything. He knows their thoughts and deeds, He sees what's in their hearts and on their minds and is fully aware of their evil intent. And therefore He turns the tables by answering their question with a question of His own in verse 19 *"Show me the coin used for paying the tax."*

So they bring Him a coin and in verse 20 Jesus asks them more questions *"Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"* It's a couple of simple questions requiring a simple answer which they give in verse 21 *"Caesar's..."* Then Jesus gives them this superb answer *"So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's"*

Wow! Such wisdom. So perfect an answer that no one could accuse Him of anything, or be offended by what He had said. And the way Jesus got his questioners to tell Him who was on the coin was really a profound move, the whole thing stunned them by their reaction recorded for us in verse 22 *"When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left Him and went away."* They couldn't do anything else really – unless they were willing to repent of their evil intent and become His followers!

So what lessons are to be learned from this for us today I wonder?

Well, I guess the first one is that we have to pay our taxes due without grumbling. But also we should pray for God's wisdom in every situation. This is not only for when we are dealing with those who would wish to trip us up or speak out against others, but for every situation in life. It's particularly important when it comes to matters of faith. We can easily say or do things that turn people away, or offend them somehow if we are not careful. These things are not always intentional, but can occur through simple misunderstanding. But each soul is very precious to God therefore we need His wisdom and guidance each and every day. When and how we talk about our faith to others is another situation that requires the wisdom of God. Taking advantage of every opportunity to expand the kingdom by sharing the good news of Jesus needs divine input to maximise effect, and we should pray for wisdom and courage to bear such fruit. Words of Jesus from Matthew 10 v 19/20 *"...do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you"*

Another lesson for us is to be aware that Jesus is not fooled by appearance. He knew these flatterers were not true believers, and had ulterior motives. We may appear to be followers of Him, saying all the right things and acting in the right way when we're with fellow Christians on a Sunday – but what are we like the rest of the time? I remember a minister of many years ago telling us that one of his congregation had dialled his number in error. Thinking she was speaking to the council office she yelled "My dustbin hasn't been emptied and I want to know what you're going to do about it!?" Not a good Christian attitude I'm sure you'll agree. But apparently she was charming on Sundays when she was in church!

The reaction of these men of evil malice also hold a lesson for us. They tried in vain to fool Jesus. To tempt Him into voicing an opinion that would be His downfall. And we too can be subjected to such things, especially as followers of Jesus. For if Satan attacked Jesus through these scheming men then so can we fall foul to such behaviour set to trap us into doing wrong. Therefore we must always be on our guard. But look what happens when Jesus is wise to them and gives His brilliant answer. These enemies could have only been impressed by Him. They would not have foreseen His insight to resit their evil plan, but He did – and the result was clear in Matt 22 v 22 which tells us *"they left Him and went away"* Which reminds me of the scripture in James 4 v 7 which tells us to *"Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."*

That leads into another lesson from today's reading. Jesus is being put on the spot concerning the authority of the gentile Romans who rule over Judea and impose unfair taxes on God's chosen people, the Jews. This also has implications on the use and importance of money. So it's a politically loaded question that has financial consequences, but the answer Jesus gives makes it quite clear that there is something more important than both – and that is God the Father in whom we should honour above all else. 'Give unto God what is God's'. That means us! For are we not made in the image of God? (Genesis 1 v 26) Have not all things been created through Him and for Him? (Colossians 1 v 16). Have we given ourselves to God, that He can use us to do His will?

And lastly, what are we looking for in the Messiah? Even the disciples hope for something earthly, something temporary and of this world. As did most of the Jews of the day. They hated Roman secular rule and their customs which they saw as a violation of God's laws. It pained them to be subject to their authority. This is what made the Pharisees so sure that Jesus would give an answer against Caesar and Rome! But as Paul reminds us in Romans 13 v 1 *"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established."* Didn't Jesus Himself when arrested and in custody tell Roman governor Pontius Pilate *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above"* (John 19 v 11).

Early in His ministry, after feeding the 5,000, Jesus had to escape the crowds because they wanted to make Him king. John 6 v 15 *"Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself"*

In the previous chapter to today's reading we find Jesus riding into Jerusalem where palm leaves were spread before Him as the crowds shouted 'Hosanna to the Son of David' expecting Him to save them from Roman occupation. Even after His death and resurrection we are told that on one occasion while Jesus was eating with them, the disciples gathered round Him and asked in Acts 1 v 6 "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*" This was before they received the Holy Spirit, who made all things clear to them, enabling them to speak out about the salvation that Christ brings to all those who believe on Him.

So have you found the Messiah? Do you understand the good news? Is Jesus real to you? Does He excite and inspire you to follow His example and teaching? And are you focused on the things of God rather than the things of earth? For one day we will be with Him in paradise, and that's not a temporary place, but for all eternity with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our next hymn speaks of the name of Jesus from which devils fear and fly:-

StF 357 – Jesus the name high over all

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|---|---|
| 1) Jesus - the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
And devils fear and fly. | 4) O that the world might taste and see
The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
Would all the earth embrace. |
| 2) Jesus - the name to sinners dear,
The name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
It turns their hell to heaven. | 5) His only righteousness I show,
His saving grace proclaim;
'Tis all my business here below
To cry: 'Behold the Lamb!' |
| 3) Jesus - the prisoner's fetters breaks,
And bruises Satan's head;
Power into strengthless souls it speaks,
And life into the dead. | 6) Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
Preach him to all, and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb!' |

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Intercession

Dear Lord God we come before you now with our prayers of intercession for our broken world, a world where hatred and greed rule, a world that has become selfish, angry, dissatisfied and hopeless. We ask for a change of heart, that your spirit may move across this globe convincing humankind of their sinful ways bringing an attitude of repentance and forgiveness, that would lead to a longing for the living God and a determination to seek the will of the master in all things for the good of all. We especially bring before you now the issue of the war in the Middle East between Israel and the Palestinians, triggered by terrorists many lives have been lost, innocent people suffer and there is no easy solutions to the extremely volatile situation which we hear of each day on the news. We also remember all those suffering in war torn Ukraine. We place it before You now dear Lord, not knowing how or when peace will return to these places. We pray for all those who try and assist, bringing aid and diplomacy to people in need of help and assistance in these tragic times. We also pray for parts of the world hit by natural disasters, where people are still trying to rebuild their lives long after the stories disappear from the headlines. We pray for the persecuted Christians in so many countries, which now includes those in India. The list goes on as we find ourselves with so much to pray for each and every week.

Lord in Your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Creator God, may all that encourages the people of the world in goodness, honesty and compassion be blessed and grow. We pray this blessing for our own nation too, we pray for integrity and honesty, that leaders of government, industry and commerce may be transparent in their actions.

Transform hearts and minds and bring about real change. We pray for all those who are finding it hard to make ends meet, with the cost of living crisis that are pushing more people into poverty. Plagued by anxiety in so many ways concerning so many issues, help us to see that we should be placing our trust and hope in You for all our needs and answers. May we rest in Your sovereignty and seek Your will for us, that this land may become a better place.

Lord in Your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

We pray now for Your church worldwide, strengthen and encourage all believers. Help us to live in harmony with one another, that together we may be one voice for the kingdom. We ask that your word would be clearly and faithfully proclaimed in all the nations churches and that, through it, we would be challenged, encouraged, inspired and changed for the better, becoming more Christ like in all we say and do. We pray now for all the churches in our circuit and all those who work tirelessly to keep them functioning. Use your church to bless the communities in which they are placed. Bless the work of our own church and help us to be aware of those from this church who are in need, we ask in the precious name of Jesus, that You reveal Yourself to them bringing healing and comfort in their times of trouble.

Lord in Your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Everlasting God we pray for ourselves as we start the week ahead. Help us to be mindful of Your love for us, that we will be patient and kind towards others, humble in service and compassionate towards those in need, remembering that Christ died for us that we might be redeemed by His precious blood. And so, as He gave His life for us, may we now be His eyes and ears, His hands and feet as we submit to His will proclaiming the good news at each and every opportunity that comes our way.

Lord in Your mercy - **Hear our prayer. Amen.**

Our last hymn speaks of God's deep wisdom and the gift of Christ His Son:-

StF 455 – All my hope on God is founded

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| 1) All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
Only good and only true.
God unknown, He alone
Calls my heart to be his own. | 4) Daily doth the almighty giver
Bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
Pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand, at his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command. |
| 2) Human pride and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray our trust;
What with care and toil we fashion,
Tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower. | 5) Still from earth to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
For the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call, one and all;
Ye who follow shall not fall. |
| 3) God's great goodness aye endureth,
Deep his wisdom passing thought;
Splendour, light, and life attend him,
Beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore, from his store
New-born worlds rise and adore. | |

Robert Bridges based on Joachim Neander

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. **Amen.**