

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 26 February 2023

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 98:1-3

Opening Hymn: 239 Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven

Confession of Sin

Most merciful God, Who are of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and hast promised forgiveness to all those who confess and forsake their sins; We come before You with a humble sense of our own unworthiness, acknowledging our manifold transgressions of Your righteous laws. But, O gracious Father, Who desires not the death of a sinner, look upon us, we beseech You, in mercy, and forgive us all our transgressions. Make us deeply sensible of the great evil of them; And work in us a hearty contrition; That we may obtain forgiveness at Your hands, Who are ever ready to receive humble and penitent sinners; for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, our only Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Micah 7:18-20

Hymn of Preparation: 501 Lord, Speak to Me, That I May Speak

Old Covenant Reading: Proverbs 15:1-4

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 7:1-6

Sermon: *Judging and Discerning*

Psalm of Response: 32B How Blest Is He Whose Trespass

Confession of Faith: Apostles Creed (p. 851)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Hymn: 414 In Christ There Is No East or West

PM Worship

517 I Know Whom I Have Believed

454 I Lay My Sins on Jesus

220 Give Praise to God

OT: Ezekiel 36:22-33

NT: John 6:60-71

Sermon: *He Who Has the Words of Life*

Adult Sunday School: Heidelberg Catechism – Lord’s Day 13

Lord’s Day 13

**Q. Why is he called God’s “only begotten Son”
when we also are God’s children?**

A. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God.
We, however, are adopted children of God—
adopted by grace for the sake of Christ.

Q. Why do you call him “our Lord”?

A. Because—
not with gold or silver,

but with his precious blood —
he has delivered and purchased us
body and soul
from sin and from the tyranny of the devil,
to be his very own.

Suggested Preparations

Monday (2/20) Read and discuss Matthew 7:1-6.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. (ESV)

John Stott writes:

Our Lord’s injunction to ‘judge not’ cannot be understood as a command to suspend our critical faculties in relation to other people, to turn a blind eye to their faults (pretending not to notice them), to eschew all criticism and to refuse to discern between truth and error, goodness and evil. How can we be sure that Jesus was not referring to these things? Partly because it would not be honest to behave like this, but hypocritical, and we know from this and other passages his love of integrity and hatred of hypocrisy. Partly because it would contradict the nature of man whose creation in God’s image includes the ability to make value-judgments. Partly also because much of Christ’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is based on the assumption that we will (indeed should) use our critical powers. For example, we have repeatedly heard his call to be different from the world around us, in that we are to develop a righteousness which exceeds that of the Pharisees, to do ‘more than others’ in the standard of love that we adopt, not to be like the hypocrites in our piety or like the heathen in our ambition. But how can we possibly obey all this teaching unless we first evaluate the performance of others and then ensure that ours is different from and higher than theirs? Similarly, in Matthew 7, this very command not to ‘judge’ others is followed almost immediately by two further commands: to avoid giving ‘what is holy’ to dogs or pearls to pigs. And to beware of false prophets. It would be impossible to obey either of these commands without using our critical judgment.

Read or sing Hymn 239 Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven

Tuesday (2/21) Read and discuss Matthew 6:25-34.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (ESV)

Michael Wilkens writes:

I believe that one of the most important ways of actually carrying [out Christ’s teaching] is to learn to regularly express our gratitude to God for what He is doing, and what He has done, in preparation for relying on Him tomorrow. A way of reversing the trend toward anxiety is to look around at what we have and what God has done and then say, “Thank you.” That is the theme of the heartfelt chorus “Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart,” which most of us have sung at one time or another. Whether we are weak or strong, poor or rich, Jesus’ teaching on wealth and worry is rooted firmly in what He has done for us. He is our Master and Provider, the One who has given us kingdom life, kingdom priorities, and kingdom values, by which we can truly say, “Thank You!”

Read or sing Hymn 501 Lord, Speak to Me, That I May Speak

Wednesday (2/22) Read and discuss Proverbs 15:1-4.

A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.
The tongue of the wise commends knowledge,
but the mouths of fools pour out folly.
The eyes of the LORD are in every place,
keeping watch on the evil and the good.
A gentle tongue is a tree of life,

but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. (ESV)

R.K. Harrison writes:

A much-quoted proverb (15:1) suggests that a gentle response can defuse a potentially explosive situation. This is vastly different from unwholesome speech, which demeans and destroys a person. Wise people can expect continued prosperity, but the wicked will be beset by threats to their improperly acquired wealth as a form of divine retribution. God refuses to be appeased by sacrifices from the wicked, evidently because they have not repented, but is delighted by the prayers of the righteous. There are stern warnings from an all-seeing God about forsaking the way of wisdom. If the very depths of the abyss, symbolized by Sheol and Abaddon as the uttermost recesses of destruction and death, are exposed to the LORD, how much more evident are human motives.

Sing or Read Psalm 32B How Blest Is He Whose Trespass

Thursday (2/23) Read and discuss Ezekiel 36:22-33

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

“Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt.” (ESV)

Iain Duguid writes:

God’s “wonderful plan” for our lives is not limited to taking us to heaven; it also includes bringing heaven into us, remaking us into a holy people. He

is not content merely to wash His people of their past sins and to impute to them the righteousness of Jesus Christ, He also wills to work a perfect holiness in them. This is the second stage of God's great work in redeemed humanity: renovation. God's determinate plan is that we be perfect as He is perfect, that when Christ returns, we be completely purified from all sin. To be sure, that purpose is not yet a present reality. Everyone living in this world does, in fact, still sin. But the Spirit has been poured out into our hearts, in a measure that Old Testament saints could only dream about, in order that the process might begin in us here and now in full assurance that on that day it will be completed.

To be sure, Old Testament saints also experienced the renewing work of the Spirit of God. But in their experience the work was always partial, always provisional. Now that Christ has died and risen, the Spirit of God has been given to us in full measure, so that by Him we might put to death the misdeeds of the body. At present, we may experience only the firstfruits of the Spirit's work, and we await with eagerness the fullness of redemption. But just as we look forward to the day when we will be done with sin and long for its coming, so also that promise of God provides the incentive to holy living here and now.

Friday (2/24) Read and discuss John 6:60-71

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him. (ESV)

Jesus makes clear, that in the visible Church, even amongst those who may appear to be His closest disciples – there are those who will deny and betray Him. There are two great blessings that flow from this truth. First, and most obviously, it was necessary for Jesus to be betrayed so that He could die for the sins of His people. This betrayal was the most wicked act that had ever been perpetrated – an act so wicked that Jesus here calls Judas a devil and elsewhere says that it would have been better for Judas if he had never been born.

And yet, this most wicked act of a man was part of the perfect and glorious plan of God to bring about the salvation of all His people. This is why at Pentecost, Peter would declare:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

It is rightly said that only God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick. At the end of this great *Bread of Life Discourse*, Jesus is making clear that the wicked betrayal of one of the inner circle of disciples was not a surprising tragedy – but part of the perfect plan of God. Second, we are sometimes rattled when prominent Christians – in particular well-known pastors and teachers – renounce the faith they formerly taught. Jesus is preparing us for those moments. If even one of the twelve could betray Jesus, we should be saddened but not shaken by the betrayal of modern apostates.

Read or sing Hymn 414 In Christ There Is No East or West

Saturday (2/25) Read and discuss Matthew 7:1-6.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. (ESV)

John Stott writes:

Our Christian witness and evangelistic preaching are not be entirely indiscriminate. If people have had plenty of opportunity to hear the truth but do not respond to it, if the stubbornly turn their backs on Christ, if (in other words) they cast themselves in the role of ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs,’ we are not to go on and on with them, for then we cheapen God’s gospel by letting them trample it under foot. Can anything be more depraved than to mistake God’s precious pearl for a thing of no worth and actually to tread it into the mud? At the same time to give people up is a very serious step to take. I can think of only one or two occasions in my experience when I have felt it was right. This teaching of Jesus is for exceptional situations only; our normal Christian duty is to be patient and persevere with others, as God has patiently persevered with us.

Stott's words are worth considering, by I would like to qualify them in what I think is an important way. To stop sharing the precious things of Christ with a person is not the same as *giving them up*, as Stott suggests. We can and should continue to pray for this person – that they LORD would change his or her heart and make him or her open to hearing the gospel. We ought never to imagine that anyone alive is beyond the LORD's ability to save them – even if, for a time, it might be right to stop telling them the priceless truths of God's gospel.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.