

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 21 January 2024

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-3

Opening Psalm: 100A Shout to the LORD, All Earth

Confession of Sin

Most holy and merciful Father; We acknowledge and confess before You; Our sinful nature prone to evil and slothful in good; And all our shortcomings and offenses. You alone know how often we have sinned; In wandering from Your ways; In wasting Your gifts; In forgetting Your love. But You, O Lord, have pity upon us; Who are ashamed and sorry for all wherein we have displeased You. Teach us to hate our errors; Cleanse us from our secret faults; And forgive our sins for the sake of Your dear Son. And O most holy and loving Father; Help us we beseech You; To live in Your light and walk in Your ways; According to the commandments of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: 1 John 1:6-9

Psalm of Preparation: 148B Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 49

New Covenant Reading: 1 Peter 1:13-25

Sermon: *The Empty Glory of This World*

Psalm of Response: 49 Hear This, All You Peoples

Confession of Faith: Apostles Creed (p. 851)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Diaconal Offering

Closing Hymn: 537 Jesus, Master, Whose I Am

PM Worship

219 O Worship the King

99A The LORD God Reigns on High

98C Sing a New Song to Jehovah

Old Covenant Reading: Nahum 1:12-15

New Covenant Reading: Romans 10:5-17

Sermon: *The Good News of God's Judgement*

Adult Sunday School: Heidelberg Catechism – Lord's Day 27

**Q. Does this outward washing with water
itself wash away sins?**

A. No, only Jesus Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit
cleanse us from all sins.

**Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism
the water of rebirth and
the washing away of sins?**

A. God has good reason for these words.
To begin with, he wants to teach us that

the blood and Spirit of Christ take away our sins
just as water removes dirt from the body.
But more importantly,
he wants to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign,
that we are as truly washed of our sins spiritually
as our bodies are washed with water physically.

Q. Should infants also be baptized?

A. Yes.

Infants as well as adults
are included in God's covenant and people,
and they, no less than adults, are promised
deliverance from sin through Christ's blood
and the Holy Spirit who works faith.
Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant,
they too should be incorporated into the Christian church
and distinguished from the children of unbelievers.
This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision,
which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

Suggested Preparations

Monday (1/15) Read and discuss 1 Peter 1:13-25

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for

"All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (ESV)

Suffering for your faith is hard. We have all been inspired by our brothers and sisters who have been willing suffer greatly, or even to lay down their lives, for the cause of Christ and His gospel. Yet, perhaps we have allowed slogans such as “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” to roll too easily off of our tongues. Often such sentiments are expressed most easily by those who have never spent a night in jail or been beaten for their faith. The truth is, suffering for your faith is hard. Today’s passage draws our attention to a rarely contemplated truth: Jesus gave us a pattern to show us how we are to suffer for the faith. While Christ’s pattern of suffering would repay detailed study, there are four main points of application from His example for modern Christians:

1. **Jesus didn’t seek to suffer.** In the early Church, and occasionally throughout history, there have been those who have actually pursued suffering in Christ’s name. Perhaps they did this simply out of bad theology or perhaps they did so out of the hope that their willingness to suffer would mark them out as particularly devoted followers of Jesus. In either case, such actions are unbiblical. Christ Himself did not seek to suffer.
2. **Jesus sought to avoid suffering.** We often focus on the end of Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane where He prayed “nevertheless, not My will but Thy will be done.” We should focus on this. Yet, we shouldn’t miss the fact that Jesus, who was the only perfect man, also prayed “If it is possible, remove this cup from me.” Rather than reflecting cowardice, this is precisely what the Law requires. Q/A 135 of the Larger Catechism begins: “The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others ...” For some reason, many Christians miss this and think there is something selfish about looking out for your own well-being when in fact it is your duty to do so.
3. **Jesus chose pleasing His Father over avoiding suffering.** While avoiding harm to ourselves is a duty it is not our ultimate duty. If we seek to fulfill the two great commandments of loving God and loving our neighbors this will inevitably involve at least some suffering. Yet, suffering should only be the necessary side effect of trying to please our Father in a fallen and sin filled world. Suffering should never be pursued for its own sake.
4. **Jesus endured suffering by entrusting Himself to His Father.** “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” If we must suffer for the gospel, it is a wonderful encouragement to remember that we are in God’s hands and that He will ultimately vindicate us completely while using our suffering for His glory and for the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Read or sing Hymn 100A Shout to the LORD, All Earth

Tuesday (1/16) Read and discuss Matthew 13:51-52

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (ESV)

The LORD is putting resources at your disposal so that you can bless other people with them. But what is the treasure? In this context it is clearly the Word of God and their understanding of the things of God. As the Psalmist puts it:

Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

How valuable is knowing God to you? People spend huge amounts of money to attend a good college. That can be a good investment. It is good and valuable to become something of an expert in a field like biology. But what good does it do to master biology only to miss out on knowing God?

Furthermore, the word of God is incredibly practical. The Psalmist confesses, that meditating upon the Word of God has made him wiser than his teachers and gave him more understanding than many who are far older than he is.

God is giving you a treasure.

The challenge for us is that the LORD has made this treasure so readily available to us that we can forget how exceedingly valuable it truly is. If the LORD only gave us His word once a year at a retreat in the White Mountains every single one of us would be there and we would be straining to make sure that we understood everything that He said.

Yet, instead of taking that which is of everlasting value and making it rare, the Living God has lavished His grace upon us where we each have His word in our own language with teachers and learning resources readily available. Let's respond to this grace by treating His word like the treasure that it is!

And here is one of the great things about this treasure: Giving it away doesn't diminish what you have left. In fact, the more you share the knowledge of God with other people the more you will have for yourself.

Read or sing Psalm 148B Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah

Wednesday (1/17) Read and discuss Psalm 49

Hear this, all peoples!
Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
both low and high,
rich and poor together!
My mouth shall speak wisdom;
the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.
I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre.

Why should I fear in times of trouble,
when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me,
those who trust in their wealth
and boast of the abundance of their riches?
Truly no man can ransom another,
or give to God the price of his life,
for the ransom of their life is costly
and can never suffice,
that he should live on forever
and never see the pit.

For he sees that even the wise die;
the fool and the stupid alike must perish
and leave their wealth to others.
Their graves are their homes forever,
their dwelling places to all generations,
though they called lands by their own names.
Man in his pomp will not remain;
he is like the beasts that perish.

This is the path of those who have foolish confidence;
yet after them people approve of their boasts. Selah

Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol;
death shall be their shepherd,
and the upright shall rule over them in the morning.
Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell.
But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol,
for he will receive me. Selah

Be not afraid when a man becomes rich,
when the glory of his house increases.
For when he dies he will carry nothing away;
his glory will not go down after him.
For though, while he lives, he counts himself blessed
—and though you get praise when you do well for yourself—
his soul will go to the generation of his fathers,
who will never again see light.
Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish. (ESV)

Tim Keller writes:

In ancient times a king might attack another country but be defeated, captured, and imprisoned. A ransom (verse 7) was owed for his release. Every human being owes God a death. Our sins mean we belong to death (verse 14). But God, instead of demanding a ransom from us, pays it himself (verse 15). The psalmist doesn't know how this can be done, but he is confident. The missing piece is Jesus, who by His death killed death and set us free. Only at the cross do we discover how much it cost God to redeem us "from the realm of the dead." So don't resent, fear, or envy the rich (verse 16). Pity those who have nothing more than their riches.

Sing or Read Psalm 49 Hear This, All You Peoples

Thursday (1/18) Read and discuss Romans 10:5-17

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (ESV)

R.C. Sproul writes:

When the Reformers were proclaiming the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the great objection raised against it was its seeming implication of cheap grace or easy-believism. Anyone can say they believe in Jesus, but saying so is no manifestation of true godliness. What are the 4necessary ingredients of saving faith?

Luther, following James’s teaching that faith without works is dead, asked, “Can a dead faith justify anybody?” Luther answered emphatically in the negative. Luther said the only kind of faith that justifies is a *fides viva*, a living faith, one that is manifested in a life of obedience to God. The first ingredient of faith is *notae*, which means there is content to the faith we embrace. We have heard the cultural adage, “It does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere,” but let me suggest that it matters eternally and profoundly what we believe. People can put their trust and faith in the Devil and be sincere about it. There is no comfort to be found from faith in a false object. Saving faith requires content, information, and knowledge.

The second ingredient of saving faith is *assensus*, intellectual assent to the truth of the data. We might understand and believe the facts of the resurrection of Jesus and the atonement, but that does no more than qualify us to be demons, because every demon from hell knows that information is true. That is why Lutheran Reformers said that data and intellectual assent to the data are not enough. Intellectual affirmation of the truth claims of the gospel must be embraced with personal trust and affection for the truth, something no demon will do. That is why Paul says it is not enough to believe it in our heads; we have to believe in our hearts. The Old Testament teaches that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7). The Old Testament writer has to confused organs of thinking with organs of feeling. The point is that we can say we agree with something intellectually without its ever getting to the core of our being.

I study the text of Scripture in order to take the text from the Bible and communicate it to others, but every time I prepare a sermon, I have to prepare it for myself. At the end of the day I have to look in the mirror and say, “R.C., do you believe what you proclaimed today?” Sometimes I find myself answering, “I believe it in my head.” When that happens, I must ask

myself, “Do you believe it with your life, or is this just an exercise in theology?” Ministers and teachers are in danger if the truth does not get down into the bloodstream of their hearts.

Friday (1/19) Read and discuss Nahum 1:12-15

Thus says the LORD,
“Though they are at full strength and many,
they will be cut down and pass away.
Though I have afflicted you,
I will afflict you no more.
And now I will break his yoke from off you
and will burst your bonds apart.”

The LORD has given commandment about you:
“No more shall your name be perpetuated;
from the house of your gods I will cut off
the carved image and the metal image.
I will make your grave, for you are vile.”

Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him
who brings good news,
who publishes peace!
Keep your feasts, O Judah;
fulfill your vows,
for never again shall the worthless pass through you;
he is utterly cut off. (ESV)

O. Palmer Robertson writes:

A note of triumphant exultation concludes the first chapter of the book: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace” (1:15). It might be assumed that the good tidings to which Nahum refers anticipate the release of the captives of the northern kingdom from the oppressions of Assyria. But Nahum stops short of that desired point. His good tidings center on nothing more and nothing less than the destruction of the wicked king of Assyria and his empire. The reason for rejoicing on the part of the people of God is the devastation of this brutal enemy.

Read or sing Hymn 537 Jesus, Master, Whose I Am

Saturday (1/20) Read and discuss 1 Peter 1:13-25

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who

called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

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The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

Simon Kistemaker writes:

When we call God our Father because we are His children, we should expect Him to be our judge as well. Peter adds that the Father “judges each man’s work impartially.” God does not favor anyone, whether he is rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, slave or master. The text says that God judges without looking at man’s face and that God the Father is already judging the works of each man. No one is going to be excluded from judgment, for God will judge impartially man’s every deed. Accordingly, when we invoke the Father’s name, we face an impartial judge.

What is the purpose of knowing that God is our Father and our judge? Peter continues, “Live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.” The Christian should consciously live in the presence of God. He knows that God’s eye is constantly upon him. Moreover, he also realizes that the non-Christian is carefully observing him in regard to the words he speaks and the deeds he performs. Therefore, he must be a true child of God, so that in the child the virtues of the Father are reflected.

The New International Version has rightly translated the word *fear* by qualifying it with the adjective *reverent*. The relationship between God and His child is not one of dread but of respect. God wants His child to live as a stranger on earth. That is, the child of God has his citizenship in heaven. He is a stranger in the world for the duration of the time God has given him. He is a pilgrim who seeks to please God in his daily conduct, who has deep reverence for God and His word, and who knows that he has been bought with the price of Jesus’ blood.

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