

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 24 March 2024

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 96:1-3

Opening Hymn: 351 How Deep the Father's Love for Us

Confession of Sin

O great and everlasting God, Who dwells in unapproachable light, Who searches and knows the thoughts and intentions of the heart; We confess that we have not loved You with all our heart, nor with all our soul, nor with all our mind, nor with all our strength; Nor our neighbors as ourselves. We have loved what we ought not to have loved; We have coveted what is not ours; We have not been content with Your provisions for us. We have complained in our hearts about our family, about our friends, about our health, about our occupations, about Your church, and about our trials. We have sought our security in those things which perish, rather than in You, the Everlasting God. Chasten, cleanse, and forgive us, through Jesus Christ, who is able for all time to save us who approach You through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for us. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Isaiah 44:21-23

Hymn of Preparation: 342 Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 22:1-31

New Covenant Reading: John 19:16-30

Sermon: *The Death of Death*

Hymn of Response: 336 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Confession of Faith: Ten Commandments

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Hymn: 338 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

PM Worship

80A O Shepherd of Israel, Hear Us (1-5)

80A O Shepherd of Israel, Hear Us (6-10)

280 Wondrous King, All-Glorious

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 80

New Covenant Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Sermon Title: The Face of Glory

Adult Sunday School: Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 31

Q. What are the keys of the kingdom?

A. The preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline toward repentance. Both of them open the kingdom of heaven to believers and close it to unbelievers.

Q. How does preaching the holy gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven?

A. According to the command of Christ:
The kingdom of heaven is opened
by proclaiming and publicly declaring
to all believers, each and every one, that,
as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith,
God, because of Christ's merit,
truly forgives all their sins.
The kingdom of heaven is closed, however,
by proclaiming and publicly declaring
to unbelievers and hypocrites that,
as long as they do not repent,
the wrath of God and eternal condemnation
rest on them. God's judgment, both in this life
and in the life to come, is based on this gospel
testimony.

**Q. How is the kingdom of heaven
closed and opened by Christian discipline?**

A. According to the command of Christ:
Those who, though called Christians,
profess unchristian teachings
or live unchristian lives,
and who, after repeated personal and loving admonitions,
refuse to abandon their errors and evil ways,
and who, after being reported to the church,
that is, to those ordained by the church for that purpose,
fail to respond also to the church's admonitions—
such persons the church excludes
from the Christian community
by withholding the sacraments from them,
and God also excludes them from the kingdom of Christ.
Such persons, when promising and demonstrating
genuine reform, are received again as members of Christ
and of his church.

Suggested Preparations

Monday (3/18) Read and discuss John 19:16-30.

So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was

written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

“They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (ESV)

D.A. Carson writes:

The protest of the chief priests shows they feel the sting of Pilate’s savage irony; but their suggestion of an insertion, “I am the King of the Jews,” to make the matter one of Jesus’ claims and no more, would strip the governor of his last revenge. And so he stands firm. Thus, Pilate’s firmness is not motivated by principle and strength of character, but by the hurt obstinacy and bitter rage of a man who feels set upon. It is not ... that Pilate refuses to change the truth into a lie, but that he is determined to humiliate those who have humiliated him. This view of Pilate is confirmed by other sources.

But at [another] level, Pilate’s malice serves God’s ends. The Lord Jesus is indeed the King of the Jews; the cross is the means of His exaltation and very symbol for the proclamation of the kingship of Jesus to the whole world: ‘Thus did Pilate *Tell it out among the heathen that the LORD is King* (Psalm 96:10).’ Thus, the two men most actively and immediately responsible for Jesus’ death, Caiaphas and Pilate, are unwittingly furthering God’s redemptive purposes, unwittingly serving as prophets of the King they execute.

Read or sing Hymn 351 How Deep the Father’s Love for Us

Tuesday (3/19) Read and discuss Read and discuss 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (ESV)

Thessalonica was not an easy place to be a Christian. Perhaps the best-known verse among evangelicals about Thessalonica is from Acts 17 when Paul preaches in the synagogue at Berea: “Now these Jews were **more noble than those in Thessalonica**; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” This makes sense since the Jews in Thessalonica had reacted so violently against the gospel that Paul had to leave the city in order to protect the Christians there from further persecution. Our minds naturally move on with Paul as we read through Acts, but First Thessalonians reminds us that there was a group of brand new Christians who remained in Thessalonica who were enduring this continued persecution. How can we comfort believers like that? Here’s what Paul did:

1. Paul and his traveling companions prayed regularly for the Thessalonians.
2. Paul told the Thessalonians that he was praying for them (v. 2).
3. Paul gave thanks for the Thessalonians (v. 3). We are often more motivated by those who give thanks for us and believe in us than by those who warn us about how we might fall short.
4. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they had been chosen by God (v. 4). The LORD’s sovereign grace can be one of the greatest comforts in times of suffering.
5. Paul had been, and continued to be, a good example of a faithful disciple for the Thessalonians to imitate (vv. 5-6).
6. Paul pointed the Thessalonians to Christ’s Second Coming. When we are healthy and times are good, we can actually grow quite comfortable with our current lives.

Yet, when struggles come (and they will!) it is important to remind ourselves that this is not the way the world is meant to be (nor the way we are meant to be). One day the LORD will return and make His invisible rule visible. He will wipe away every tear from your eyes and usher in an eternal Kingdom in which righteousness will dwell.

As you think through this list, you will realize that this is a helpful guide for how we can encourage our persecuted brethren as well.

Read or sing Hymn 342 Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted

Wednesday (3/20) Read and discuss Psalm 22:1-31.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts.
On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother’s womb you have been my God.
Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.

Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water,

and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O LORD, do not be far off!
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion!
You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.
For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.

All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,

even the one who could not keep himself alive.
Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it. (ESV)

Today's psalm begins with jarring abruptness: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from the cry of my groaning?" We are naturally drawn into the psalmist's agony and wonder what he could have done that led the LORD to abandon him like this. Then we come to the cross and find these very lips on the lips of Jesus – the only intrinsically righteous man who has ever lived – and we are dumbfounded. Why? How could it be that He would suffer like this? The great sixteenth century Anglican, Richard Hooker, answers this question perhaps as well as is humanly possible:

Let men count it folly, or frenzy, or whatever. We care for no knowledge,
no wisdom in the world but this, that man has sinned and God has suffered,
that God has been made the sin of man and man is made the righteousness
of God.

Why was He forsaken? Jesus chose to be forsaken *for you*. As we meditate on this prophetic psalm, written a millennium before the cross, we enter into the horror of what the King of glory suffered for His people. Yet that isn't the end of the story. We should remember that Psalm 22 begins with our Lord's cry of dereliction but that is not how it ends. Verse 23 calls the people of God to praise "For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hid His face from Him; but when He cried unto Him, He heard (v. 24)." Indeed, the last nine verses of the psalm are a celebration of the Lord's victory. Surely Jesus knew this when He cried in agony from the cross. As unfathomable as His suffering was; Jesus knew that it was a suffering unto victory.

Sing or Read Hymn 336 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Thursday (3/21) Read and discuss 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (ESV)

Scott Hafemann writes:

From Paul's perspective, God's power and glory are not abstract theological postulates, but realities to be experienced. Conversion and transformation are brought about not by putting two and two together and making the right decision, but by an encounter with the living God. Men and women are created anew when they come face to face with the presence of God's Spirit. Our attempts to psychologize Paul's thought or to relegate it to the realm of feelings are not a reflection of Paul's perspective, but a reaction to the poverty of our own knowledge of God.

Thus, in drawing out the contemporary significance of Paul's theocentric worldview, we need to keep in focus the ways in which Paul sees the glory of God in Christ at work among the church. Otherwise, it is simply too easy to become enamored with the false glory of the health and wealth gospel. In our day and age, as in Paul's, the moral transformation into God's character pictured in 3:18 and the endurance in the midst of adversity modeled in 4:1-8 seem too mundane to be miraculous. To consider health more important than holiness, however, is to slight God himself and his work in bringing about the new creation in our midst. For Paul, the reality of the resurrection is already being inaugurated in the conversion of believers into the body of Christ.

As a result, the power of Christ in establishing his reign as the Son of God is already taking hold in the lives of believers, who, as children of God, wage war against the flesh. And the return of Christ will consummate God's kingdom with the resurrection of those who are owned by God, as signified by the down payment of the sanctifying Spirit in their lives. We thus live in the overlapping of the ages (the kingdom is here, but not yet here in all its fullness). The life of faith therefore takes place within the context of the suffering of God's people, who, being "saved in hope" (Rom. 8:17-25), live and endure by the power of the Spirit while they await the future consummation.

In view of this emphasis on growth in holiness and the endurance of faith as the present demonstration of God's power, there is a twofold application of Paul's thought to the experience of Christians in general. (1) Paul's portrayal of his apostolic ministry calls us to accept his authority and embodiment of the gospel as legitimate. There is a dangerous tendency among Christians to pick and choose their religious authorities according to their likes and dislikes. For many today, Paul is no longer popular. Nonetheless, his claim to authority throughout these chapters is unmistakable. To reject his person and message is to reject the gospel of Christ. As challenging as Paul's message may be, we turn away from it at our own peril.

Friday (3/22) Read and discuss Psalm 80.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
 you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.
 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
stir up your might
 and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved!

O LORD God of hosts,
 how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears
 and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,
 and our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved!

You brought a vine out of Egypt;
 you drove out the nations and planted it.
You cleared the ground for it;
 it took deep root and filled the land.
The mountains were covered with its shade,
 the mighty cedars with its branches.
It sent out its branches to the sea
 and its shoots to the River.
Why then have you broken down its walls,
 so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
The boar from the forest ravages it,
 and all that move in the field feed on it.

Turn again, O God of hosts!
 Look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
 the stock that your right hand planted,
 and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.
They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down;
 may they perish at the rebuke of your face!
But let your hand be on the man of your right hand,
 the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!
Then we shall not turn back from you;

give us life, and we will call upon your name!

Restore us, O LORD God of hosts!

Let your face shine, that we may be saved! (ESV)

Allen P. Ross writes:

The focus of this psalm is on the destruction of the nation of Israel because of its spiritual defection. While there are certainly lessons here for an individual to learn, the message is primarily concerned with the religious community, a community that once enjoyed the marvelous provisions and protection of the LORD, but ruined it all with apostasy. And so people in other communities of faith pray earnestly for God to be gracious to them and restore them to the life they lost by sin.

Sin had increased steadily in the northern kingdom until there was almost nothing left of what God had begun to do for them and through them. Jaki reminds us that this calamity is not unique to the ancient kingdom of Israel; down through history and increasingly today believers witness the steady loss of churches, and indeed of what used to be Christian nations across Europe, to unbelief and disobedience. Those who remain faithful must pray regularly and earnestly for their restoration or the unbelief and secularism will continue to grow. This can be stated more directly in an expository form: *When once-believing communities disappear because of unbelief and disobedience, the faithful must pray for God's grace so that they will be restored to the faith and enjoy His blessing once again.*

Read or sing Hymn 338 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Saturday (3/23) Read and discuss John 19:16-30.

So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

“They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (ESV)

Leon Morris writes:

John describes Jesus’ death by the words “He ... delivered up His spirit,” which is not the usual way of referring to death. Actually, none of the four Gospels says simply that Jesus died or uses any of the customary ways of indicating the end of this mortal life. John’s verb is used in the Greek translation of Isaiah 53:12 of the death of the Suffering Servant, but there it is said that He delivered up “His soul,” whereas John has “His spirit.” It is possible that this way of putting it indicates a certain element of voluntariness. Jesus did not stand in the same relation to death as do the rest of us. Some have taken “spirit” here to refer to the Holy Spirit and think that Jesus either gave the Spirit back to God or that He gave the Spirit to His followers. But the language does not require this, and we have no reason for thinking that John would have included a reference to such a far-reaching activity without making it much more clear.

John, then, is describing a death that differed from other deaths. This death was the means of bringing about the salvation of sinners throughout the ages. John tells the story in such a way as to bring out the accomplishment of the divine purpose. In the end it was this that mattered, not the treachery of Judas, nor the scheming of the high priests, nor the weakness of Pilate. In and through them all God worked out His purpose, a loving purpose, a purpose that issues in salvation for all believers.

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