

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 16 June 2024

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-3

Opening Hymn: 167 Jesus, Where'er Your People Meet

Confession of Sin

Almighty God, Who are rich in mercy to all those who call upon You; Hear us as we humbly come to You confessing our sins; And imploring Your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken Your holy laws by our deeds and by our words; And by the sinful affections of our hearts. We confess before You our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness; And all our failures and shortcomings toward You and toward fellow men. Have mercy upon us, Most merciful Father; And of Your great goodness grant that we may hereafter serve and please You in newness of life; Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Exodus 34:5-7

Psalm of Preparation: 103C Come, My Soul, and Bless the LORD (1-4)

Old Covenant Reading: Ezekiel 34:1-16

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 18:5-14

Sermon: *The Shepherd and His Youngest Sheep*

Psalm of Response: 103C Come, My Soul, and Bless the LORD (5-8)

Confession of Faith: Apostles Creed (p. 851)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Diaconal Offering

Closing Hymn: 182 Can a Little Child like Me

PM Worship

444 Come to the Waters

508 Jesus, Priceless Treasure

376 The Head That Once Was Crowned with Thorns

Old Covenant Reading: Jeremiah 9:23-26

New Covenant Reading: Philippians 3:4-11

Sermon Title: Loss and Gain

Adult Sunday School: Fellowship Lunch

Suggested Preparations

Monday (6/10) Read and discuss Matthew 18:5-14

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than

with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (ESV)

Grant Osborne writes:

The church is intended to be a community of caring members. When Jesus commanded that discipleship involves “receiving” and “welcoming” one another, He was turning an “assembly” of disciples into a community of believers who share and care for each other. When this happens, the church evolves further into a family of deeply involved “brothers and sisters,” who encourage and love one another “deeply from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

The church is also responsible to protect its members from spiritual predators who will destroy their walk with God. Paul warned the Ephesian elders of “savage wolves” who would “not spare the flock,” comprising some “even from your own number” (Acts 20:29-30), a prophecy that came true about five years later (Eph 4:14; 1 Tim 4). The church must respond swiftly and firmly to such dangerous people, and Jesus demands excommunication for such unless they repent (18:17; cf 1 Cor 5:3-5; 1 Tim 1:20).

Read or sing Hymn 167 Jesus, Where'er Your People Meet

Tuesday (6/11) Read and discuss Matthew 18:1-4

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (ESV)

The same faith by which we have gained life is the faith by which we are to live! That is critical to grasp. Nevertheless, the same faith actually looks different in justification than it does in sanctification. In receiving the righteousness which comes to us in Christ ... this faith is **purely passive**. It simply receives God's gift. In sanctification, this faith continues to remain focused on Jesus Christ yet dependent upon the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit this faith expresses itself *in the service* of others!

That sounds simple enough. The problem is that our remaining pride continues to get in the way.

If you are like me, you have probably discovered just how challenging it can be to kill off pride and to genuinely pursue biblical humility. The first mistake that we can easily make is to imagine that the opposite of thinking *highly* of ourselves ... is to think *poorly* of ourselves. But that is wrong at a foundational level.

If you are thinking badly about yourself - you are still focused **on yourself!**

While pride **looks inwardly** humility **looks outwardly** to focus on the grace of God in Christ and to focus on the needs and wellbeing of others.

There is a related error that is so common in our society that nearly everyone here engages in precisely because it is so socially acceptable. Instead of speaking badly about yourself you simply deny that there is anything exceptional about who you are. Sure, you teach Beowulf to teenagers and your cooking would make a Michelin Star Chef blush “but it’s really nothing anybody could whip this up!” You’re an Attorney or you have a PhD from Harvard but you follow the socially acceptable custom of pretending that you’re not really particularly smart certainly no smarter than anyone else in the room; and so on ...

Now I’m not going to tell you to stop following this custom. If you do, you might find that people really don’t like it. But what I am going to tell you is that no matter how vigorously you engage in this practice it won’t do you the slightest bit of good in terms of becoming genuinely humble.

For one thing **it isn’t true** and deep down you will know that it isn’t true. Perhaps *more importantly* humility is not about disparaging the gifts that the LORD has given to you! Our gracious LORD has given all of you distinct gifts and you should receive and develop those gifts with a grateful heart. Humility is not about disparaging your God given abilities. It is about using them to bless other people to the glory of God rather than as a means of puffing yourself up!

Read or sing Psalm 103C Come, My Soul, and Bless the LORD (1-4)

Wednesday (6/12) Read and discuss Ezekiel 34:1-16

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. (ESV)

Doug Stuart writes:

This is not a passage that teaches about the nature of human government in general or that enumerates the principles of leadership. Its concern instead is the historical plan of God, in which He exchanges one type of leadership for another over His people. The change is brought about by the need to resolve a conflict. That conflict involved the failure of Israel’s kings as leaders and the firm plan of God that His people should be obedient to Him and should enjoy His blessing. Their own natural tendency to sin was reinforced by the corrupt natural leadership of the kings, and they were, to boot, exploited by those whom they placed over them. This cycle needed breaking, and God accomplished it via the Babylonian conquest and exile. Israel and Judah were no more. They never again could become independent nations and, thus, never again would have kings – at least not of the type they had suffered under thus far.

What they would get, because God would see to it, was a new kind of king, a new David, who would be true to God and thus a true shepherd for the owner’s flock. Therefore, it is only in Christ, the one true son of David, that this prophecy is fulfilled. He is the one who provided for God’s people – all who truly name Him as Lord – to have the great benefits of the restoration summarized by the images of peace and safety in this chapter. Some of those benefits have begun to come already, such as the peace that passes

understanding (Phil. 4:7; cf. John 14:27). Many others await their full implementation in the Davidic king's second and final coming.

Sing or Read Psalm 103C Come, My Soul, and Bless the LORD (5-8)

Thursday (6/13) Read and discuss Jeremiah 9:23-26

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart." (ESV)

We live a fragmented culture. In a fragmented culture there is no consensus about right and wrong or even about who we are. In a coherent culture, people have roles assigned to them by the surrounding culture and people find their identities simply by accepting the role or roles that culture assigns to them. Because we live in a fragmented culture, most Americans go through some sort of "identity crisis" at some point in their lives. In today's passage, Jeremiah helps us understand how identities are formed in a fragmented culture and how we, as God's people, should go about in forming our own identities. In verse 23 we read:

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ..."

Here Jeremiah lays out three of the most common ways in which people seek to develop a positive identity: (1) Wisdom; (2) Might; and (3) Wealth. If you are honest with yourself at all, you will acknowledge that – like every other person who has ever lived – you want to hear the applause and approval of other people about who you are and what you are accomplishing. So, what's wrong with want to receive praise for our wisdom, might, and wealth? It is helpful to realize that today's passage doesn't begin at verse 23. Up until that point Jeremiah had been describing how ancient Jewish society had become entirely undone because the powerful in society let their ravenous desire for *more* to run unchecked. They pursued more wisdom, might, and wealth in order to puff themselves up. In the process they trampled over their neighbors who were created in the image of God. Furthermore, they (and we!) were acting as though each of these gifts from God was actually their own accomplishment. One way to notice this phenomenon is to listen to people who have become unusually successful in business or politics. Almost every one of them will exaggerate the degree to which they grew up in humble circumstances. In fact, you will almost never hear someone say:

My parents were quite affluent and were able to send me to an outstanding private high school. When I messed up in my second year of college and dropped out, my parents provided the money I needed to start over and eventually they put out over \$100k so I could attend an elite business school. Of course, I should add that all the contacts I had with other affluent individuals and business leaders really greased my path to success. I wouldn't have accomplished a tenth of what I have without them.

I should hasten to add that there is absolutely nothing wrong with people becoming wealthy and using this wealth to provide the best possible opportunities for their children. But why is it that successful people rarely acknowledge many of the advantages they have had in life? The answer is simple; they (and we!) want to present themselves as “self-made men”. That is, they want to take the credit. Oddly, our fractured culture encourages this sort of behavior. Our secular culture only knows how to “cure” bad self-esteem with this sort of trumped-up high self-esteem. Regretfully, some Reformed Christians react against this nonsense by virtually promoting low self-esteem. God through Jeremiah gives us something far better. The LORD created us to be of immense value and He gives us something far greater than wisdom, wealth, and might to glory in. He has given us Himself. Jeremiah's answer to forming healthy identities in a fragmented culture is simply this: We are to find our identity *in the LORD*.

Friday (6/14) Read and discuss Philippians 3:1-11

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (ESV)

Catechisms can give us short memorable definitions that we can hang our theological hats on. Those who look down upon such formulations as simplistic fail to grasp how helpful such clear and memorable definitions can be in living to the glory of God. Sometimes we

find such clear and pithy definitions right in the Scriptures themselves. For example, in verse 3, Paul provides a remarkably concise and helpful definition of a Christian. What is a Christian?

1. Christians are the true people of God (“the circumcision”).
2. Christians worship by the Spirit of God.
3. Christians glory in the Christ Jesus.
4. Christians put no confidence in the flesh.

While these four identity markers fit together, it is the last marker that Christians are most frequently tempted to abandon. Our culture both cries out and subtly entices us to have confidence in our own ability to do good – apart from the Spirit of God. We begin teaching the power of positive thinking early. What is the most memorable line from *The Little Engine that Could*? “I think I can! I think I can! ...” To the degree that this children’s story is simply teaching the importance of perseverance – that is for the good. But very easily this message crosses over into putting confidence in the flesh. When this idea grows up it takes a form like that of William Henley’s famous poem *Invictus*:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

This language is stirring but it is also damning. It would be difficult to find a better definition of the flesh than the assertion that my soul is unconquerable and that “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.” What does Paul say about this sort of attitude? Paul says that Christians are those who put no confidence in the flesh ... none at all.

Read or sing Hymn 182 Can a Little Child like Me

Saturday (6/15) Read and discuss Matthew 18:5-14

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (ESV)

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