

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 15 September 2024

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 96:1-3

Opening Psalm: 72B Hail to the Lord's Anointed

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: Galatians 2:20

Hymn of Preparation: 170 God, in the Gospel of His Son

Old Covenant Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-13

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 21:18-22

Sermon: *Fruitful Faith*

Psalm of Response: 116A I Love the LORD, for He Has Heard My Voice (1-4)

Confession of Faith: Ten Commandments

Diaconal Offering

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Psalm: 116A I Love the LORD, for He Has Heard My Voice (5-8)

PM Worship

134 Come, Bless the LORD with One Accord

478 Jesus Loves Me, This I Know

406 Jesus, with Thy Church Abide

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 41:1-10

New Covenant Reading: Jude 1-2 (Sermon Text)

Sermon Title: *Safe and Secure*

Fellowship Meal: No Sunday School This Week

Suggested Preparations

Monday (9/9) Read and discuss Matthew 21:18-22

In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.

When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” (ESV)

Our Lord’s promise that His Apostles could tell a mountain to be cast into the sea and it will happen has resulted in a wide variety of explanations. None of these explanations has won over either majority of scholars or the majority of faithful Christians. It turns out that not everything in God’s word is equally clear. If we interpret this promise in its immediate context, where Jesus is symbolically enacting a judgment upon [at least] the religious establishment in Jerusalem who have failed to bear fruit for the sake of the Kingdom of God, then the mountain in view might be the Temple Mount with Jesus saying that, by faith, His Apostles will overcome the hostility of the religious establishment as Christ through them establishes the New Covenant Church. Where the very best scholars cannot agree, it is probably wisest to not be overly dogmatic.

Nevertheless, as William Lane points out, this passage does teach us something that is both vital and universal about the Christian faith:

Basic to [all responsible readings of this passage] is the concept of faith as a quiet confidence in the power and goodness of God who accomplishes *everything*. The corollary to faith is miracle, and in this immediate context faith is unwavering trust in miraculous divine help.

The Dead Sea is visible from the Mount of Olives, and it is appropriate to take the reference to “this mountain” quite literally. An allusion may be intended to Zech. 14:4. In the eschatological day described there the Mount of Olives is to be split in two, and when the LORD assumes His kingship “the whole land shall be turned into a plain” (Zech. 14:10). The prayer in question is then specifically a Passover prayer for God to establish His reign. What is affirmed is God’s absolute readiness to respond to the resolute faith that prays. What distinguishes the faith for which Jesus calls from that self-intoxication which reduces a man and his work to a fiasco is the discipline of prayer through faith. God’s sovereignty is its only restriction. ... The man who bows his head before the hidden glory of God in the fulness of faith does so in the certainty that God can deal with every situation and any difficulty and that with Him nothing is impossible.

Read or sing Psalm 72B Hail to the Lord’s Anointed

Tuesday (9/10) Read and discuss Matthew 21:12-17

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He

said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read,

“‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise’?”

And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. (ESV)

David Garland writes:

What do Jesus’ arrival and actions in the Temple mean for the status of the Temple whose sacrifices are supposed to offer atonement? God told Solomon that He had chosen the Temple as a house of sacrifice where He would be attentive to the prayers made in this place. But God warned in the same breath:

But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this Temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. This Temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, “Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this Temple?” People will answer, “Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them – that is why He brought all this disaster on them.” (2 Chr 7:19-22).

The remarkable thing is that even though the LORD brought this judgment on the Temple and Jerusalem through the Babylonians in 586 B.C., later generations of Jews failed to learn the message and heed its warning. A vital question for the Church is whether or not we have learned the lesson. As Jesus makes clear in the book of Revelation, He is walking around in the midst of His Churches ... bringing both blessing and judgment. If a group of people who call themselves a church abandon the faith then Jesus will remove their lampstand and that "church" will soon cease to exist.

Read or sing Hymn 170 God, in the Gospel of His Son

Wednesday (9/11) Read and discuss Jeremiah 17:5–13

Thus says the LORD:

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.
He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.
He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?
“I the LORD search the heart
and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds.”

Like the partridge that gathers a brood that she did not hatch,
so is he who gets riches but not by justice;
in the midst of his days they will leave him,
and at his end he will be a fool.

A glorious throne set on high from the beginning
is the place of our sanctuary.
O LORD, the hope of Israel,
all who forsake you shall be put to shame;
those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth,
for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water. (ESV)

Terence Frethaim writes:

As a collection of wisdom sayings, these verses bear a family resemblance to the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and certain psalms. The use of images from the nonhuman world makes the point that God’s historical action is in tune with the very structures of the creation. Perhaps the presence of wisdom teachers among the exiles made the incorporation of such sayings into this prophetic corpus important. The use of this language became a way of integrating prophetic thought with that of the wisdom

school, perhaps as a way of showing that their concerns are fundamentally compatible.

These sayings seem designed to speak especially to exilic readers. In their contrast of the righteous and the wicked, their purpose is to give direction for a shape that the people's life should take in the aftermath of the judgment just described. The basic issue is put in these terms: In whom do you trust? Unlike those who have chosen the way of trust in other gods (vv. 1-4), their daily walk is to be marked by trust in Yahweh. Most basically, the issue at stake is not one of intellectual error, but the lack of trust in God. The call to trust in the LORD rather than in human beings becomes the key instruction for maximal well-being.

The first unit (vv. 5-8) is a wisdom poem that resembles other texts, especially Psalm 1. Both texts sketch the two basic ways of the righteous and of the wicked. Both texts use natural imagery in contrasting these two ways. Yet, whereas Psalm 1 centers on the Law and the reader's delight in it, the Jeremiah text focuses on the reader's trust in the LORD (v. 7). In this respect, it connects well with another wisdom theme: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7) and "trust in the LORD with all your heart" (see Prov 3:5-8).

Those who turn away from God and put their trust in human beings are cursed, that is, their lives are marked by judgment – the divinely mediated negative effects of such misplaced trust. They are likened to a desert shrub that lives in the parched and salt-filled lands of the wilderness. They will not experience the seasonal changes that bring life-giving water on a regular basis and will shrivel up in the heat and drought. ... This word is a reminder to exilic readers regarding the negative effects of lack of trust in the LORD.

On the other hand, those who trust in the LORD are blessed, that is, their lives will be marked by bounty and well-being. They will be like a tree that is planted near a steady supply of water so that its roots can depend on this regular source of nourishment. When heat or drought do come, and come they will, its leaves will stay green, and it will continue to bear fruit. In the context of judgment, this means that those who are faithful to the LORD will survive the heat of the LORD's anger, or any other adversity, and continue to thrive.

Read or sing Psalm 116A I Love the LORD, for He Has Heard My Voice (1-4)

Thursday (9/12) Read and discuss Isaiah 41:1–10

Listen to me in silence, O coastlands;
let the peoples renew their strength;
let them approach, then let them speak;
let us together draw near for judgment.

Who stirred up one from the east
whom victory meets at every step?
He gives up nations before him,
so that he tramples kings underfoot;
he makes them like dust with his sword,
like driven stubble with his bow.
He pursues them and passes on safely,
by paths his feet have not trod.
Who has performed and done this,
calling the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD, the first,
and with the last; I am he.

The coastlands have seen and are afraid;
the ends of the earth tremble;
they have drawn near and come.
Everyone helps his neighbor
and says to his brother, “Be strong!”
The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith,
and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil,
saying of the soldering, “It is good”;
and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.

But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, “You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off”;
fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (ESV)

R. Reed Lessing writes:

After the prologue announces the manifestation of Yahweh’s glory and the coming of a Warrior-Shepherd (40:1-11), the next person to appear on stage is an unnamed conqueror from the east (41:2-3). Who is this man and whom does he represent? What is notable is the emphasis placed upon the conqueror’s swift travel, military might, and righteous calling. Given the expectation of “a highway for our God” (40:3), the establishment of righteousness, and the coming of a Warrior, it is natural for us to assume that this victor represents Yahweh, the mighty and gentle Shepherd. What we are not prepared for, though, is that about a century and a half after the

ministry of Isaiah, Yahweh will employ Cyrus as His “shepherd” (44:28). Though he does not believe in Yahweh (44:5), he will be God’s agent to free the exiles and let them go home. Then a second agent will come some five centuries later and be the ultimate Redeemer: Yahweh’s Suffering Servant (52:13-53:12), Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. ...

Embedded within Isaiah 41-48 is Cyrus’ provisional role as the initiator of a new exodus. But he is not the final answer to Israel’s problems. The consummation of Yahweh’s plan will be realized by means of the Suffering Servant, who is featured in chapters 49-54. Cyrus’ mission is to get Israel out of Babylon; the loyal Servant is to get Babylon out of Israel and justify God’s new people.

Friday (9/13) Read and discuss Jude 1-2

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James,

To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. (ESV)

Tom Schreiner writes:

Those whom God has called to Himself are loved by Him and kept until the day of salvation. The grace of God that called believers to faith will sustain them until the end. The emphasis on God’s grace does not cancel out human responsibility. In v. 21 the readers are exhorted, “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” God’s grace does not promote human passivity and laxity. It should stir the readers to concerted action. Nevertheless, the ultimate reason believers will persevere against the inroads of the intruders is the grace of God by which He set His love upon believers, called them to be His people, and pledged to preserve them until the end.

Read or sing Psalm 116A I Love the LORD, for He Has Heard My Voice (5-8)

Saturday (9/14) Read and discuss Matthew 21:18-22

In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once.

When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” (ESV)

Tom Wright comments:

[Jesus] came looking for fruit, but when He found none He solemnly declared that the tree would be barren forever. That's exactly what He was doing with the Temple. And the promise to the disciples, which follows from it, is not a general comment about the power of prayer to do extraordinary things (though of course it is true that all sorts of things can be accomplished through prayer). The promise is far more focused than that. Saying to 'this mountain' that it should be 'lifted up and thrown into the sea,' when you are standing right beside the Temple Mountain, was bound to be taken as another coded warning about what would happen to the Temple as God's judgment fell upon His rebellious people.

Suddenly, therefore, the lines of Jesus' work all through the earlier days in Galilee come together with a new force. All along He'd been acting as if you could get, by coming to Him, the blessings you would normally get by going to the Temple. Now He is declaring, in powerful actions, that the Temple itself is under God's judgment. We shall see in the following chapters what this will mean. The warnings become clearer still.

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