

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 23 February 2025

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-5

Opening Hymn: 168 Father, Again in Jesus' Name We Meet

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: Psalm 103:8-10

Psalm of Preparation: 2A Why Do Heathen Nations Rage?

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 25:1-12

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 26:1-5

Sermon Title: *God's Plan and Man's Plotting*

Hymn of Response: 337 Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended

Confession of Faith: Nicene Creed (p. 852)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Diaconal Offering

Closing Hymn: 231 What'er My God Ordains Is Right

PM Worship

451 Approach, My Soul, the Mercy Seat

121A I Lift My Eyes Up to the Hills

520 What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 121:1-8

New Covenant Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

Sermon Title: *Access to Heavenly Grace for Life on Earth*

Adult Sunday School: Inaugurated Eschatology I: The Kingdom of God

Suggested Preparations

Monday (2/17) Read and discuss Matthew 26:1–5

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

In this Gospel that offers so much of Jesus' public teaching, the unique concluding formula to the Eschatological Discourse signals a change: "and when Jesus completed *all* these words" (26:1). The great discourses are over. Jesus will say important things as He moves toward His betrayal, suffering, and death. Nevertheless, the Lord's voice will diminish until His final cry of dereliction and His last great shout.

From the promise of His glorious *Parousia* as Judge of all, then, 26:1-5 turns the readers' attention back to the unfinished business at hand. Near to Jerusalem, Jesus bluntly reveals to His disciples what will take place shortly. In two days, the day of the Passover sacrifice and meal will happen; that much they know already. There is more, however: it will be on that day that Jesus will be betrayed, handed over just as He has already said to them on more than one occasion. Now they know – or at least have heard – that it will happen on the Passover.

Read or sing Hymn 168 Father, Again in Jesus' Name We Meet

Tuesday (2/18) Read and discuss Matthew 25:31–46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

If the hope of Christ's return fades in our hearts, we can get discouraged and decide just to pull back and survive: I will just wait it out until I die, play it safe, and so on. The world can seem (and is!) so dark in so many ways, and there is no end to the selfishness and evil. Put your hope in this political party or agenda, and you end up disappointed. Place your trust in this program or in that geopolitical development, and you end up disappointed. Our hope is in the LORD, who made heaven and earth and who will renew the sea and sky, who will raise the dead. Grounded logically and theologically in this hope, the apostle Paul can say: "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:58).

Read or sing Psalm 2A Why Do Heathen Nations Rage?

Wednesday (2/19) Read and discuss Read and discuss Isaiah 25

O LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you; I will praise your name,
for you have done wonderful things,
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
For you have made the city a heap,
the fortified city a ruin;
the foreigners' palace is a city no more;
it will never be rebuilt.
Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.
For you have been a stronghold to the poor,
a stronghold to the needy in his distress,
a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat;
for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall,
like heat in a dry place.
You subdue the noise of the foreigners;
as heat by the shade of a cloud,
so the song of the ruthless is put down.

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.
It will be said on that day,

“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain,
and Moab shall be trampled down in his place,
as straw is trampled down in a dunghill.

And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it
as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim,
but the LORD will lay low his pompous pride together with the skill of his
hands.

And the high fortifications of his walls he will bring down,
lay low, and cast to the ground, to the dust. (ESV)

Paul Raabe writes:

There will be a victory feast in Zion, but a unique kind of victory feast. Zion did not win the victory by her own power. Yahweh alone “subdued” the Gentile attackers (25:5). Moreover, the victory feast is intended not only for Israel but also for “all the peoples.” The plural “the peoples” includes Gentiles of every ethnicity and is not restricted to natural Israel. On the one hand, Gentiles comprised the attackers, “the uproar of foreigners” (25:5). On the other hand, Gentiles, too, will enjoy Zion’s feast. Isaiah had a complex view of Gentiles, as present-tense foe of Zion but future-tense friend of Zion. The future promise of the God of Israel was eventually to bring Gentiles into His Zion to belong to His one people. The picture provides a contrast to that given in chapter 24. The contrast needs to be understood in terms of space. Outside of Zion, there will be no wine and song (24:7-11), but inside Zion will be feasting and joy. In the cities of the other nations outside of Zion, there are only a few survivors (24:12-13), but in Zion, there will be multitudes of Gentiles. The Assyrian crisis gave one concrete instance of this theology at work. God through the Assyrian army destroyed many cities and lands, but He protected His Zion from Assyria. Isaiah extended this protected Zion of his day into the ultimate Zion that will include Gentiles. It is one example of the scandal of particularity. Eternal fellowship with the true God, the almighty Creator, the God of Israel, is given to all people but only on God’s terms and in God’s holy Zion.

Read or sing Hymn 337 Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended

Thursday (2/20) Read and discuss Psalm 36:1-12.

Transgression speaks to the wicked
deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God
before his eyes.
For he flatters himself in his own eyes
that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit;
he has ceased to act wisely and do good.
He plots trouble while on his bed;
he sets himself in a way that is not good;
he does not reject evil.

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
your judgments are like the great deep;
man and beast you save, O LORD.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light.

Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your righteousness to the upright of heart!
Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.
There the evildoers lie fallen;
they are thrust down, unable to rise. (ESV)

James Montgomery Boice writes:

The conclusion of the psalm is a prayer in which David prays for others who know God and are upright (v. 10) and for himself that he may be preserved from evildoers (v. 11). So confident is he of this final deliverance that the psalm closes with a prophetic glimpse of the wicked who, in his vision, “lie fallen –thrown down, not able to rise” (v. 12).

What is the final application of the psalm? It is what we have already seen in verse 7. What distinguishes the righteous from the wicked are not the good deeds of the godly (though they inevitably express their right relationship to God by good deeds), but rather that they, in distinction from the wicked, have taken refuge under the shadow of God’s wings. The words “find refuge” mean to flee for refuge, like a man guilty of manslaughter fleeing from the avenger of blood. They mean to flee with haste and intensity, stopping for nothing, until by the full thrust of our entire natures we find safety and deliverance beneath the wings and in the unfailing mercy of Almighty God.

That mercy is to be found in Jesus Christ. He said of Jerusalem, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen

gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34). The masses of Jesus’ day missed that great blessing and perished. The masses miss them today. Do not be one of them. Come to Jesus now.

Friday (2/21) Read and discuss Hebrews 4:14–16

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (ESV)

There is a wonderful ambiguity in the expression, “Let us hold fast our confession!” Is this something that we do as individuals or as a community? The answer is both! We must personally make this confession but we are strengthened by each other – and we frequently make this confession together.

Amy Peeler puts it really well. She writes:

The church owes a debt of gratitude to the many faithful, who in the early centuries of our faith, honored the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, as attested in the inspired Scriptures, by distilling those sacred texts into creeds. These are human words with a complex history and afterlife, and yet they have been proven by the test of time in which they have allowed generations of believers to hold fast ... to the faith. ... Now I am part of a tradition that communally confesses either the Apostles’ or Nicene Creed each week. With my mouth ... I voice these words, ... and with my ears ... I hear these words voiced by others. Repetition has not dampened but only deepened my joyful ties to this confession. Each week it reminds me who God is, sovereign and inestimably gracious. I find my identity in a story wider and deeper than my own, which catches my finite life up ... into eternity.

Read or sing Hymn: 231 What’er My God Ordains Is Right

Saturday (2/22) Read and discuss Matthew 26:1–5

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” (ESV)

Tom Wright comments:

Of all the mountains in Switzerland, the Eiger is the most stunning in its sheer, massive bulk. Its north face, at whose foot I was standing, looks as though some enormous giant had taken an axe and sliced through the mountain range, cutting away what might have been an ordinary, more gentle northern side, sloping down with meadows and woodland. Instead, what is left is this shocking vertical wall of bare rock, more than a mile high, blocking out the sun, simultaneously compelling and terrifying. I am drawn to it as by a magnet. Though my climbing days are long past, I can well understand why people want to spend days risking their lives to attempt it.

That is how we should feel as we stand at the foot of the final ascent of St Matthew's [account of the] gospel. We have walked at a steady pace through the hills and valleys of the story. We have sat down to hear Jesus deliver another parable or discourse. We have marched with Him along the road, enjoying the sunshine of the early days in Galilee, and the remarkable views as the disciples gradually realized more of what the kingdom was about. We have arrived in Jerusalem and watched dramatic events unfold. But we are now standing in front of a sheer wall of rock, and if we don't find it both compelling and terrifying we haven't got the right spectacles on.

The death of Jesus of Nazareth is one of the most famous and formative events in human history. There is a lot to be said, before you begin to study it line by line, for first running your eye right up the wall of rock, for reading the next two chapters through at a single sitting, with the door shut and the telephone turned off. Allow the whole thing to make its proper impact on you.

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