

Call to Worship:

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ the first-fruits; then at His coming, those who belong to Him.

Then the end will come when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put everything under His feet Now when it says that everything has been put under Him, this clearly does not include the One who put everything under Him. And when all things have been subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will be made subject to Him who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all.

Prayer of Invocation:

Dear Father in heaven you have made this glorious earth that shouts your goodness and power. Though it has rebelled still your presence shines through day and night. Our hearts have received your true revelation of the purpose and wonder of Creation and we see you in it all and desire to know you more fully. And now God-breathed Scripture and the Holy Spirit teach us the endless truths of your love through Christ who died and rose for our help and salvation. We come before you in sincere worship

Hymn: *by Isaac Watts* written for children in 1715

1. I sing the almighty power of God that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad and built the lofty skies.
2. I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
the moon shines full at his command, and all the stars obey.
3. I sing the goodness of the Lord that filled the earth with food;
he formed the creatures with his word, and then pronounced them good.
4. There's not a plant or flower below but makes your glories known;
and clouds arise and tempests blow, by order from your throne.
5. All creatures, numerous as they be, are subject to your care;
there's not a place where we can flee but God is present there.
6. God's hand is my perpetual guard, he guides me with his eye;
why should I, then, forget the Lord, who is for ever nigh?

Scriptures:

- Daniel 12 (Reflect on the great themes still to unfold and Daniel's personal Godliness in this passage)
- Acts 1:1-10 (be reminded again of the current purpose of history in this passage and recognize that by faith you too have a role in it. Imagine sitting in that group and hearing and seeing those things)

Prayers with the suffering church:

Reflect on Psalm 35. A psalm by the godly persecuted. Particularly verses 1-4, 9-12, 17-18, 27-28. Maybe you the reader may be identifying with some of these thoughts because you seek to live a Godly life amongst one or more who oppose you. Take heart and rest in God)

Why doesn't God do something?

A common question and challenge to faith even in an honest seeker is: 'Why doesn't God do something about all this suffering in the world?' Wars and suffering in the Middle East, Armenia, Sudan, and many other places prompt these sorts of questions.

A young emergency doctor I know who was a sensitive young Christian seeker growing up was faced with a mother losing her young child to a terrible painful disease in his first month in Emergency. He asked that question, sincerely.

I studied philosophy in my first year at Uni and the whole first semester was taken up with: 'Can an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-benevolent being exist'? However, I realised many courageous, intelligent believers have trusted in God's faithfulness in painful circumstances far more testing than sitting in a lecture hall debating ideas!

The English media personality Stephen Fry disbelieves in the goodness of God because of the parasite that causes painful damage to the eyes of African children.

Bob Hawke, likewise, having been raised in a Christian home with his father a minister, visited India and the poverty and human degradation made him give up his belief in the goodness of God and become agnostic.

It is a question which, in the experience of deep tragedy can either test and maybe break faith or faith can bear up and sustain a person.

Now there are superb essays and books written on this subject, such as C S Lewis's 'The Problem of Pain' amongst countless others. Nick Hawkes (who contributes to these Orders of Service) also wrote a booklet of meditations called 'Flying above the Storm', in which he shared faith-building insights during his own journey with uncertain and painful cancer.

So back to the question; why doesn't God do something?

Well, God is doing something but there are some things He won't, even can't do. He has a great plan. Number one, Father God desires all humanity to be saved and is holding off on 'closing the doors of the Ark' so the maximum number can enter the Ark of eternal salvation.

Beloved, do not let this one thing escape your notice: With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise as some understand slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.¹

Understand this great grace of God and most questions fall into place. Now is not the place or time for world or cosmic perfection. That time will come and that is an absolute certainty. Read the last chapter of the concluding Book of Divine Revelation to see the proof of that.

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But right now, and in this particular time of history, the whole work of the Trinitarian Lord God is to establish and continue working out His majestic work of mercy, grace and salvation. Proof of this is everywhere in the Holy Scriptures, both Old Covenant and New. It was started by Jesus when he spoke from heaven recruiting Saul and changing his heart from murder to mission. Here are His words.

*'I am sending you to them to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those sanctified by faith in Me.'*ⁱⁱ

This is precisely what God is doing by means of His Son, Jesus Christ who is anointed Lord over all the earth. How is He Lord overall? How is He in supreme control? There it is, in the risen Christ's words to Saul; 'Open their eyes', turn them away from the promptings of Satan and transfer your loyalty and allegiance to Jesus. Receive the forgiveness of sins and His daily sanctifying presence. Which literally means do what He says not what your flesh, the world or the Devil say. The same words as His charge at the end of Matthew's Gospel 'make disciples of all peoples'. His soldiers – evangelists, teachers, apostles and all lively saints – are His answer to ridding the world of violence and all sin wherever it occurs, even in your life and mine.

The son of the founder of Hamas, that violent terrorist movement sworn to kill all Israelis, who murdered babies and vulnerable old people on October 7: This man has found repentance, and forgiveness of sin and is now being changed into the likeness of Jesus, daily seeking goodness for all he meets.

That's what God is doing to destroy violence on the earth. He changes men's hearts and turns them from wretchedness to righteousness. That is what He is doing in answer to that question. Are you doing that with Him? Are you part of the New Order of righteousness which in the end will win? Or are you still passively indifferent or minimally interested in this great global renovation of righteousness? Each one of us can be the answer to the question; 'why isn't God doing something with all this suffering in the world?'

There are two great events that will occur prior to the end of history; the Gospel will be preached to all nations and the Lawless One, the Anti-Christ will arise in the world.ⁱⁱⁱ In both of these, Christ's people, his 'little ones' have a vital role; to proclaim and to persevere.

Yes, the day will come after he returns when even the dangers and enmity in the fallen created order will be made peaceful again. When everything from cancers to cataclysms and all perverse kinkiness will be for all time eradicated. That is yet to come, and its slowness is solely because God is slow to anger, slow to wrath in order that more may find safe haven in the grace of Christ.

Prayer:

Dear Father, fill me with such love that I will honour your name in any company and proudly boast of your goodness. Lead me along the path of confident restfulness throughout circumstances convinced that you are working out your purposes not only in the great canvass of your history but in my life as well. Keep me first and foremost assured that nothing anywhere in me or in all of creation can prise me out of

Why Doesn't God Do Something?

the fixed embrace of your love. I pray in your Son, my Saviour's Name, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen

Hymn: (original text by Dallan Forgaill a monk, in honour of the courage of missionary *Patrick of Ireland*)

1. Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
all else be naught to me, save that Thou art;
Thou my best thought by day and by night,
waking and sleeping, Thy presence my light.
2. Be Thou my Wisdom, be Thou my true Word;
Thou ever with me, I with Thee, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son,
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.
3. Be Thou my Breastplate, my Sword for the fight;
Thou my whole Armor, Thou my true Might;
Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my strong Tower,
raise Thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
4. Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.
5. High King of heaven, Thou heaven's bright Sun,
May I reach heaven's joy, O bright heaven's sun;
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

Benediction:

Now to Him who is able to strengthen you by this gospel and by the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery concealed for ages past but now revealed and made known through the writings of the prophets by the command of the eternal God, in order to lead all nations to the obedience that comes from faith — to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

This service prepared for HopeNet SA by Rev Ian Clarkson

ⁱ 2Peter 3:8

ⁱⁱ Acts 26:18

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 24:14-15, 2Thessalonians 2:1-4