

## Call to Worship

*Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfil your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me. (Ps 50:14-15)*

## Worship in song *by M Ledner*

You are my hiding place, You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance,  
Whenever I am afraid I will trust in You.  
I will trust in You. Let the weak say: "I am strong in the strength of the Lord.

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## Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 25:1-14

## Prayer of confession

Dear Heavenly Father,

We worship you for who you are, a God of righteousness and integrity.

We therefore need to confess that:

- Our good intentions are often lost in weakness;
- Our forgiveness becomes lost in recriminations;
- Our encouragement becomes lost in envy;
- Our doing good becomes a way to look good;
- Our helpful actions become our need to be appreciated;
- Our advice becomes a need to control;
- Our servant heart becomes a search for status; and
- Our asking forgiveness becomes self-justification.

Loving Father, free us from the tyranny of self to become like Jesus, that we might love as he loves and build with you what is truly good. Amen.

## Assurance of forgiveness

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Pet 3:18)*

## Prayer of thanksgiving

Dear Jesus,

Your holiness blinds us with awe; your love guarantees our worth; your forgiveness frees us for new beginnings; and your character emboldens us to walk with amazement and delight in the intimacy of your love. You are always there, and you always understand. For you have known our temptation, experienced our grief, and have shared our pain.

And now, because of your grace, we share in your love, we share in your power, we share in your mission, and we share in your future.

Thank you dear Lord for this privilege. Amen.

## Holy Communion

On an evening, two thousand years ago, we hear the tale of two cups. The first was a cup of wine. In ancient Greek, Roman and even Chinese cultures, it was the practice to pour out a libation of wine as an offering to their pagan gods. But on this night, a man who was God, took wine and gave it to his friends. Jesus took the cup, identified the wine in it with the blood that he would shortly shed to pay for the price of your sins and mine, and said, "This is the cup of my blood, drink this all of you." Jesus wanted everyone to share in his sacrifice on their behalf and have their sins blotted out. This was the first cup.

The second cup Jesus drank that evening was the cup of suffering (mentioned in every gospel). In Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospel, Jesus prays to his Heavenly Father in the Garden of Gethsemane to take the cup of suffering from him, but then says he is prepared to drink it if it is the Father's will (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42). In John's gospel he simply says, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (Jn 18:11). So let's pray:

*Lord Jesus,*

*we cannot imagine the anguish of your soul caused by you taking our sins upon you. You who knew no sin, willingly took the vile abuse meted out by predators of our children and the violent abusers of women.*

*Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup.*

*You who knew no sin willingly took the degradation and self-obsessed escapism of the addict.*

*Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup".*

*You who knew no sin, willingly took the pleasure addicted selfishness of the careless.*

*Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup".*

*You who knew no sin, took the avarice of the greedy and their destruction of the poor.*

*Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup".*

*You who knew no sin, willingly took the evil of those who delight in cruelty.*

*Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup".*

*You who knew no sin, willingly took the malicious arrogance of those who curse God.*

*Its evil was distilled, put into a cup ...and you drank that cup".*

*Lord Jesus, we are so grateful that you drank the cup of God's wrath on our behalf. We are humbled and amazed at the extent of your love for us.*

*Thank you, Lord Jesus.*

## The Bible Reading

- 1 Corinthians 15:19

## The Message GET A HOPE THAT INSPIRES

Scientists tell us that our sun will die in 4.5 billion years time. If you manage to escape to another solar system, you are not out of the woods, because the universe itself is due to die and fade away in what is known as 'heat death.'

The British theologian, Professor David Wilkinson, writes about how non-Christian scientists are feeling about a world without hope. In his book, *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe*, he writes:<sup>1</sup> *This end of Universe in the heat death of futility raises a great deal of pessimism within the scientific community.*

Certainly, the 20<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, didn't express much hope. He said: *The world which science presents for our belief is even more purposeless, and more void of meaning ... all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction ... and the whole temple of man's achievements must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins.*<sup>2</sup>

The American physicist, Steven Weinberg, author of the book, *The First Three Minutes*, says mournfully: *The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.*<sup>3</sup>

In their search for hope, some physicist suggest that there are an infinite number of universes in existence, or coming into existence, so that the chance of there being one which allows life should not be surprising. The physicist and theologian, John Polkinghorne highlights the bleakness of this view, describing such universes as: "occasional islands of meaningfulness in an engulfing sea of absurdity."<sup>4</sup>

The cosmologist, Paul Davies summarizes the overall feeling concerning this scenario, saying: (An) *almost empty universe growing steadily more cold and dark for all eternity is profoundly depressing.*<sup>5</sup>

The huge question each of us need to answer is "why"? Why does anything exist – and what on earth am I here for?

The Bible makes it clear that this is a question God expects us to ask. The apostle Paul says that it is reasonable for people to look at existence, ponder its meaning and to let it introduce them to the possibility of God (Rom 1:20).

### Future Hope

Scientists can't offer much hope regarding the future. They sometimes talk about the need to find some sort of scientifically conceived life-boat to escape the inevitable death of our solar system in 4.5 billion years time.

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1 David Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe*, T & T Clark, London, 2010, p.21.

2 Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not A Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, edited by Paul Edwards. (London: George Allen & Unwin.1957) p.107.

3 Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe*, (New York, Basic Books, 1977) p.144.

4 John Polkinghorne, "Eschatology: Some Questions and Some Insights from Science," pp 29-41 in *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, J. Polkinghorne and M. Welker (eds.), (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), 34.

5 Paul Davies, *How to Build a Time Machine*, (Penguin, 2002) p.48.

The Bible teaches this world is connected to the essence of the next world, (it being combined with heaven and transformed to become the 'kingdom of God'). We must, however, remember that it is something that is remade by God as something new and eternal. That was the kingdom Jesus preached – and it is in that which gives me hope.

It is not the case that God's eternal plans will become a victim of this imperfect world's inevitable decay. To suggest that is to have a pathetically inadequate view of God.

I care for the environment and for creation around me not because, if I don't all God's plans for the future kingdom are ruined. I have motive enough to look after our current creation for two very good reasons:

- 1) My Heavenly Father made it in the **past** and told me to look after it as something good that he has created.
- 2) My Heavenly Father will pattern, in part, his **future** kingdom on aspects of our present existence – so I'm not going to desecrate that pattern.

With the coming of God's new kingdom, everything changes. However, this doesn't mean the coming kingdom has no continuity with our present creation. The Bible speaks of transformation (1 Cor 15:51), not annihilation of this creation (1 Cor 15:42-44). The one verse that does suggest complete annihilation of the earth is 2 Pet 3:10. But properly understood, this verse speaks of the destruction of the earth in terms of judgement of sin... and goes on to say that all will be *lumaino* (Greek) = laid bare, i.e. dissembled and put on show for what it really is.

We get a clue about both the continuity, yet completely transformed nature of God's coming kingdom, in the nature of Jesus' resurrected body. First, we note that it was no vapid ghost. The resurrected Jesus was real and could be touched. He was, however different in that it wasn't always recognized by his disciples and wasn't troubled by some of our physical laws. He could, for example, enter a room with locked doors.

The apostle Paul describes the difference between our earthly body and our spiritual body by saying that our earthly body is like a seed, pregnant with the possibilities of God – which only realizes its full possibilities in God when it is transformed into its intended goal and becomes a magnificent mature plant (1 Cor 15:42-44).

The significance of this is that we should not scorn this creation. It has some sort of continuity with the kingdom to come. However, we should have hope because the kingdom to come will be the full potential of what God's creation is intended to be. It is little wonder that Paul speaks in Romans 8:22-23 of all creation longing to be renewed.

These motives are enough for me to care for our environment. I don't believe that I have to look after the environment for the purely selfish reasons, in that if I don't, I will frustrate God's plans to build his eternal kingdom. To believe that, is to have a pathetic view of God's sovereign power. But I will respect his creation, because God made it and told me to care for it.

### **Know the source of hope**

In our hopelessness, God reached down to humanity, declared his love for us, showed us his morality in Jesus Christ, died as hideous death to pay the price for our sins... and now

invites us to share his love, his community and the adventures of his eternity. In other words, God, in his love, comes to us and gives us hope. Jesus, *Emanuel*, literally means "God with us." It is "*God with us*" that gives us hope.

All atheists can do is clench their fists in defiance of meaninglessness and strive for the illusion of progress – a sort of self-delusion that will distract them from the fact that the only thing they can look forward to is ultimate futility.

Against the mournful, hopeless dogma of atheism, we have a hope based on our certain future in eternity. The Apostle Paul wrote: "*If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied*" (1 Cor 15:19).

Christ Jesus is the one who brings hope. When writing to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul reminds them, saying: "*Remember that you were at (one) time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world*" (Eph 2:12)

It may interest you to know that in Hebrew, the word 'hope,' *tiqvah*, literally means 'a twisted cord used to attach' (to make safe). Therefore, without hope, you are unsafe.

### **The nature of hope**

Acknowledging God, and his rightful place in the scheme of things means we are not limited to ourselves. God has a plan which he is bringing into being with complete certainty.

In Scripture, hope in God means trust in God: *Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint* (Is 40:31).

The apostle Paul says: *We ... groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?* (Rom 8:23-24)

Paul is saying that you can't hope for something you already have. It would be like hoping you get a pushbike for Christmas ten days after Christmas when you already have already been given a pushbike. Paul's emphasis is not on the uncertainty of hope, but what it means for the timing of things. We've yet to enter into that 'already given' certain hope.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of a hope so certain that it is an anchor for the soul in turbulent times (Heb 6:19). That's why Paul tells us to be "*joyful in hope*" (Rom 12:12).

### **Know the power of Godly hope**

Hope is a beautiful thing. It energises and revitalises. It has been said that: Hope is the magnetic substance that draws us above our circumstances into the purposes of God.<sup>6</sup>

Hope is amazingly motivational. The apostle Paul speaks of, *endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thess 1:3). Hope, i.e. faith, makes you tough enough to finish your ministry on planet Earth.

Paul said, "*Since we have such a hope, we are very bold*" (2 Cor 3:12). I'm bold enough to finish my God-given mission on planet earth.

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<sup>6</sup> Anon.

### Understand Your Hope

The universe is a very imperfect place. Whilst beauty, harmony, order and humour exist, suffering, waste, evolutionary blind alleys, persecution, diseases and malicious acts of evil also exist.

Without seeing the world from God's perspective, it's pretty easy to get discouraged. However, God has chosen to let you in on a secret. He has told us how it is all going to pan out. He's told us how it's all going to end. God can guarantee this because he stands outside of time and has already seen it. God has let us in on the secret of how it's all going to end, and has done so in order that we would have hope amidst all the tough times in life.

God says:

- Things will not stay imperfect forever. Have hope and look forward to an eternal future, because life is a temporary assignment.
- You who are addicted to sin and who think you are terminally unholy, have hope because Jesus died on a cross to pay the price for your sins to make you holy enough to be with me.
- You who wonder at your meaning, have hope because I am giving you a mandate to achieve things of eternal value during your assignment to planet Earth.
- You who struggle in your weakness, have hope because I will empower you with my Spirit to achieve things which you could not do alone.
- You who are not sure of what is true, have hope because I've chosen to share my timeless principles with you in the Bible.
- You who despair of justice, have hope because every injustice will be judged and dealt with in the end.
- You who are suffering, have hope because notwithstanding the worst abuses life can throw at you, I understand what you are going through and will walk with you through it all.
- You who long for a better future, have hope because I, God, invite you to share in a future kingdom of love, creativity, delight, humour, harmony and adventure.

### Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

### Benediction

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:13)*

*This service was provided by Nick Hawkes for HopeNet SA*