

Welcome everyone to share in this time of fellowship and worship of our Lord Jesus Christ!

LET'S PRAY:

Loving Father, we welcome you to our time of worship. May our words and our sharing be a testimony to you, our God, and our Father. Join us, we pray, as we do our best to honour you, and seek to know your son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose name we claim, and for his gift to us through the cross we give thanks.

Amen

CALL TO WORSHIP:

- Psalm 34:

*I will bless the Lord at all times
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord:
Let the humble hear and be glad
O magnify the Lord with me,
And let us exalt his name together.
I sought the Lord and he answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears
Look to him and be radiant:
So your faces shall never be ashamed.
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,
And was saved from every trouble.
O taste and see that the Lord is good :
Happy are those who take refuge in Him.*

David's psalm reminds us that God pays attention to those who call on Him, whether they seek an escape from trouble, or help in its midst, we can always be sure that he acts on behalf of those who love Him.

SONG : "Salvation belongs to our God" by Adrian Howard / Pat Turner

1. Salvation belongs to our God, who sits upon the throne, and unto the lamb,
Praise and glory, wisdom and thanks, honour, and power, and strength.

Be to our God forever and ever, be to our God forever and ever, be to our God
forever and ever, Amen.

2. And we the redeemed shall be strong, in purpose and unity,
Declaring aloud, praise and glory, wisdom and thanks, honour and power, and strength.

Be to our God forever and ever, Be to our God forever and ever, Be to our God
forever and ever. AMEN.

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Bible readings / Message:

- Luke 8: 42—48

As he went, the people pressed around him. And a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment; and immediately her flow of blood ceased. And Jesus said “Who was it that touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said “Master the multitudes surround you and press upon you!” But Jesus said “Someone touched me: for I perceive that power has gone forth from me”. And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came forth trembling and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace”.

For this poor woman, she lived in a world of barriers, both physical and spiritual. For a moment contemplate her life. She is a Jewish woman who is PERMANENTLY ritually unclean – she cannot worship in the temple, no man, and maybe no woman will go near her. She is, in other words, the quintessential Pariah--- Jesus is her last chance (according to Dr. Luke and Mark 5).

Luke’s record of this encounter between the Messiah and an unclean woman brings a tear to the eye. But this is just the kind of situation Jesus was “made” for. The touch of the woman was the touch of lostness, fear, helplessness, desperation..... did not our Lord come to seek and to save such people. When I was doing my ministry studies (way back!) a class member asked our lecturer could we “unpack” Jesus’ pastoral ministry? What, I thought—its all here in black and white—clear. Jesus senses the touch, knows healing has occurred, and looks upon a terrified outcast trembling at his feet. Tears no doubt running down her face. Jesus’ response to the woman whose life was one barrier after another: “My daughter!”, so she IS included and accepted as family. What a relief, no rebuke, no abuse-- and, then the affirmation “your faith has healed you. Go in peace”. With that she is free – no barriers, spiritual or physical.

- Philippians 4: 10—20

“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I was in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret to being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do this through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me, in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts: what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

In 44BC Caesar was assassinated. This was followed by a series of civil wars, the biggest of which took place near Philippi in 42BC involving up to 200,000 men. Leaders such as Antony, Brutus, Cassius, fought battles for the future of Rome. The outcome was inconclusive, but Philippi was declared a Roman colony, and a retirement option for veterans who were given land and money after their army service. No doubt many took the offer and settled in Philippi rather than return to crowded and expensive Rome.

The context of Philippi, a Roman city, will help us to better understand Paul's letter, and its relevance to Christians today. Paul's visit to Philippi on his 2nd journey (Acts 16:12, c.60 AD), saw him in a very Roman city, where he was to establish his first European church. A mainly gentile (hence the absence of OT quotes in this letter) congregation of retired Roman soldiers, and their descendants. Roman gods would have been the norm here. Clearly, Paul is unfazed, and sets about proclaiming Christ. The outcome is evident in the content of the letter. Paul is ecstatic about the loving and generous support he receives from the church—even, NOTE, when he is in a Roman prison, still the retired officers support him generously!

What could have possibly moved the Philippian church to accept the new faith?

Paul's fervour through his own conversion miracle? Their own need for something more than the tired old pagan practices of Rome (life without barriers)? Maybe the amazing presence of the Holy Spirit!

Let's pause and remember that later, Lydia would be baptised outside Philippi, (Acts 16:11) – what is it about this place that God seems to bless? Everything you would think of would go against a willingness to be open to the Word here, but no, it's the opposite. The church grows, the church is generous to a fault, the people care for Paul and probably Silas too! Paul is overjoyed at their care for him: v 14 "it was good of you to share in my troubles". Nowhere else does Paul heap such lavish praise on his converts.

What does this say to the church today? We hear about church planting plans, missional programs etc, etc, but I wonder are we afraid of sharing the gospel because of a hostile post modern worldview?

Paul's example in Philippi should reignite the church to go beyond the "Barriers", perceived or otherwise, and just like Paul, we may be amazed at the response that is forthcoming.

SONG: *(Psalm 62) by Stuart Townsend & Aaron Keyes*

1. My soul finds rest in God alone, my Rock and my salvation;
A fortress strong against my foes, and I will not be shaken.
Though lips may bless and hearts may curse, and lies like arrows pierce me,
I'll fix my heart on righteousness, I'll look to Him who hears me.
O praise Him, hallelujah, my Delight and my reward;
Everlasting, never failing, my Redeemer, My God.

2. Find rest, my soul, in God alone, amid the world's temptations;
When evil seeks to take a hold, I'll cling to my salvation.
Though riches come and riches go, don't set your heart upon them;
The fields of hope in which I sow, are harvested in heaven.
3. I'll set my gaze on God alone, and trust in Him completely;
With every day pour out my soul, and He will prove His mercy.
Though life is but a fleeting breath, a sigh too brief to measure,
My King has crushed the curse of death, and I am His forever.

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Prayers for the world:

We pray, oh Lord, for the tragic earthquake outcomes in Turkey. Lord God there are so many stories of heartbreak coming from that place. Father the desperate vision of a father holding the hand of his (dead) 15 year old daughter is so hard to think of.

Also our God there are other tragic events on this planet, including with your own people in Nigeria- Cameroon-and Pakistan. May we be generous Lord in giving and sharing with those who struggle, and may your peace be upon them.

Amen

Blessing:

Philippians 4:22-23. Paul's final Greeting:

All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household (the church grows!!)

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Amen

It is my prayer that this message may be of some encouragement to you.

Grant: 0403412480