

Worship at Home

8th September 2024

From Proverbs 22

"A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

Rich and poor have this in common:
The Lord is the Maker of them all.
The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.

Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life."



The kingdom of God is justice and joy - and that kingdom comes close today. Come into this space, Holy God, as I worship and learn, read and reflect. Come and show me something of your creativity, and your invitation to be a part of the change I want to see in the world. **Take a moment to be peaceful.** If you are able you may like to plant your feet on the floor and concentrate on your body being still (if this is not possible then do just sit quietly and comfortably). Notice how you feel and what you are thinking about and let those things float away giving thanks for each even if they are difficult feelings or thoughts. When you are ready, raise your hands open before you and give thanks for the moment you are in.

Pause

Place your open hands on your lap and consider all that's happened this week and what you might want to lay down before God asking for help or offering thanks.

Pause

Lift one hand high in the air and think about what you will offer of yourself as you worship today.

Pause

Lower your hands and return to this resource. If you feel able offer the following prayer: Loving God, I am here in this moment to worship you. Amen.

CH4 540 I heard the voice of Jesus say or God

<https://youtu.be/74kyfROS4q8?si=ZHP7bJnGKXxwFhbV>

Reading: James 2:1-10, 14-17 and Mark 7:24-37

Reflection: One Way Jesus

I suppose it's comforting, in an Eeyore-ish kind of way, the only generation of Christians to think that belief is simply a matter of the words you use, and that it doesn't need to affect ordinary life in any way.

James is writing to a Christian church that is, apparently, just like ours. The people who go to James's church are convinced enough of the claims of the gospel to call themselves Christians, and to meet regularly with others. But they don't see this as a matter that affects their fundamental understanding of the structuring of the universe. James finds this almost incredible.



His readers seem to be viewing faith as a kind of insurance policy: you probably need it as part of a sensible attempt to keep unpleasant reality at bay; in case of sickness or accident, it's nice to know that God is on your side. And surely part of the point of an insurance policy is that it allows you to carry on your normal life without any worries about the consequences of your actions?



So, James's congregation still like rich people better than poor people, clean people better than dirty people, well people better than sick people because, after all, who doesn't?

God doesn't, is James's alarming answer. God doesn't have favourites. God is shockingly blind to the normal measures of society. He doesn't seem to notice accents or cost out people's clothes and treat them accordingly. He has absolutely no need to keep in with the rich and famous, or to find favour with the influential. After all, he is God.

One of the worrying consequences of this is the possibility that God doesn't realise where he belongs in our carefully planned life. He might not be aware that he is a fail-safe mechanism, to be invoked when we are up against something that we can't cope with on our own. He might, indeed, believe that he is the way, the truth and the life, and that our attempts to make him fit our way, our truth and our life are at best touchingly misplaced and at worst completely absurd.



Faith changes the way you live, James says, in that obnoxiously black and white way of his. You might feel tempted, at this point, to turn to that nice St Paul, who really understands about the importance of faith, and doesn't go droning on about having to do things as well. Dream on. Try reading Romans 6.

There is no escaping the New Testament conviction that faith is a commitment to a changed way of life, because it is a commitment to trying to see the world with the eyes of God. This has enormous benefits for us personally, since God is understanding and forgiving beyond what we could ever expect or deserve. But the downside is that he is equally concerned about others. We are not his favourites. We must try to see as we are seen, James says in verse 13. We cannot expect God to use one standard of judgement on us if that is not the standard of judgement that we are using on anyone else.

Probably, however, we should give ourselves permission not always to be certain of God's standards. There are some fairly consistent clues in the New Testament and, sadly, suspicion of the lure of wealth is one of them. But there is also the fascinating story we have in Mark's Gospel, of Jesus's own vision being enlarged by his encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman. It feels shocking to say that this woman, in her insistent need, reminded the Son of the scope of the Father's love. But the very least the story demands is to see Jesus deeply moved by the depths of the woman's faith. She is certain that God does not have favourites, and that there is always enough in his provision to go round. It is we who are stingy, not God.

Over and over again the Gospels show us Jesus interacting with those whom most societies consider marginal. Today it might be a woman who is also a gentile, and a deaf man who cannot communicate, but most of the stories are the same. They suggest that there is something about being an insider, comfortable in the world you live in, that actually makes it harder to hear God. If the world is basically treating you quite benignly, then you tend to forget that its standards may not be God's. Why would you want to be reminded of something that might end up making your life more uncomfortable?

When James says, 'beware of a faith that has not visibly changed your life', he is speaking words we have to hear, but seldom want to.

God of all grace,
Come and be known to me here, by your grace,
Show me how to put your love to work in the world,
Show me how to be a part of all that is good and
wholesome and right,
Show me how to share the good news of your love with
people I meet,
Show me how to follow you.
Amen.

Prayer points for this week

1. Pray for what you want to give thanks for.
2. Wednesday 11th September marks the anniversary of the bombing of the twin towers, and the beginning of the so-called 'War on Terror'. Pray for peace, for the kind of peace that brings healing, not more division, not more hatred, not the possibility of retaliation, but a deeper, shalom-peace.
3. God of peace and justice, help our leaders to act for peace today, and every day. Amen.
4. This is the day that the Lord has made. This day, the day you are living right now. As the worship hymn continues: 'let us rejoice and be glad in it'. It isn't always easy to rejoice or 'be glad', but the hymn writer is inviting us into recognise that today is a gift from God, and we can celebrate that - if nothing else. How are you celebrating the gift of today? How are you making use of it? How are you using it to offer worship to God? Pray about that as you are out and about.
5. Seek out a single 10 minute slot of solitude and silence. Try to meditate, and hold a stillness in your heart. If you need to some words to focus on, try this little eight-word sentence from Psalm 46:10: 'be still and know that I am God'.
6. Pray for Refugee children who are in the middle of their first term in school here for the first time. Remember that English might not be their first language - so they could face a language barrier. They are probably not tuned into 21st century culture and probably don't have mobile phones. This will also be a barrier, needing to be overcome, so pray that those around them will be tolerant and not abusive. Food might also cause a problem: what they ate at home, may be different from what they are offered here. They may be separated from part of their families or have had to leave their parents or grandparents behind so they will be worried. And all of that before we even mention that they made have lived through some pretty awful situations in order to be here. So, pray that they will feel welcome.
7. Pray for those who support people who have experienced trauma, that they might be filled with compassion, love and hope.
8. Pray for those who find themselves alone. May they feel your presence now and always. Amen

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 259 Beauty for brokenness

https://youtu.be/O5_TVy2gHRg?si=bCBIoU8i8XkB2jVh

Blessing

God, as you bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm, blessings that we see and feel by day in the love of family, friend or neighbour; may the realization of that blessing take us out into the world to be a blessing to everyone that we meet. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day. Rev. Susan Thorburn, sthorburn@churchofscotland.org.uk If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you.