

Yateley Baptist Church, Sunday 3 May 2020

Opening Prayer

Hymn: Praise! 838

Fill all my life, O Lord my God,
in every part with praise;
that my whole being may proclaim
your being and your ways.

2 Not for the lip of praise alone,
nor yet the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
of praise in every part.

3 Praise in the common things of life,
its goings out and in;
praise in each duty and each deed,
exalted or unseen.

4 Fill every part of me with praise;
let all my being speak
of you and of your love, O Lord,
poor though I am and weak.

5 So shall you, Lord, from me receive
the praise and glory due;
and so shall I begin on earth
the song for ever new.

6 So shall no part of day or night
from sacredness be free;
but all my life, with you my God,
in fellowship shall be.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

Reading: Philippians 1:18b-30, ESV

Yes, and I will rejoice,¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

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²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Hymn: Praise! 894

Come, O fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing your grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise:
songs of God's abundant treasure,
sung by angel tongues above,
songs that tell the boundless measure
of my Lord's unchanging love!

2 I remember God's great mercy:
by his help I've safely come;
and I know he will not fail me,
but will surely bring me home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger
wandering far away from God,
and, to rescue me from danger,
shed for me his precious blood.

3 Through God's grace I am his debtor –
daily I this thought renew!
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter
bind my wandering heart to you.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love!
Take my heart, O take and seal it,
seal it from your courts above!

Robert Robinson (1735-1790)

Prayer

Hymn: Praise! 901

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
be now and ever near me,
my master and my friend:
I shall not fear the battle
if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if you will be my guide.

2 O let me feel you near me,
the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but Jesus, draw still nearer
and shield my soul from sin!

3 O let me hear you speaking
in accents clear and still;
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will:
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
and speak to make me listen,
O Guardian of my soul.

4 O Jesus, you have promised
to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory
your servant shall be too;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow
my master and my friend.

5 O let me see your footmarks
and in them place my own;
my hope to follow truly
is in your strength alone:
O guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end;
and then in heaven receive me,
my Saviour and my friend.

John E Bode (1816-1874)

Sermon: Philippians 1:27-30 – Living as Worthy Citizens

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” (v27)

Football fans are a funny bunch – defending their team to anyone and everyone but quick to turn on the players and manager if they are doing a bad job.

Fans expect loyalty from players - in order to be worthy to wear the badge, they need to be 100% committed to our team.

Even Ben Gibson got in trouble with fans and his new team for raising money for a hospice near his old club!

Players cannot, as it were, have two masters. Whatever they do off the pitch must match their loyalty to the team they play for.

That idea of loyalty, and of living up to what it is that we represent is what our verses are about this morning, Paul tells us that we are to be worthy of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The Call to be a Worthy Citizen

V27 Better translation: “Only let your manner of life as citizens be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Same word in 3:20, when he writes, “But our citizenship is in heaven”.

The language of citizenship because of the double-meaning that it had for those in the church at Philippi.

“Paul now uses the verb metaphorically, not meaning ‘live as citizens of Rome’ – although that is not irrelevant – but rather ‘live in the Roman colony of Philippi as worthy citizens of your heavenly homeland’... As Philippi was a colony of Rome in Macedonia, so the church was a ‘colony of heaven’ in Philippi, whose members were to live as its citizens in Philippi.” Gordon Fee

Being a Roman citizen had great privileges and many people were proud to be part of that. But being a citizen of heaven is even greater.

Paul challenges them. They are to live counter-culturally. They are to have a counter-citizenship whose capital and seat of power is not earthly, but in heaven and they were to place their confidence there.

“The town of Philippi was enjoying the personal patronage and benefactions of Lord Caesar, but the Philippians were subjects of the One who alone is Lord and to whom every knee (including “Lord” Nero’s) will bow.” Kent Hughes

As Christians – as those whose citizenship is in heaven, we are first and foremost defined by our faith – by the fact that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, on the cross.

Don Carson tells a story of a man who, when he was asked, “What do you do?” replied, “I’m a Christian”. The same question was asked again but with a greater emphasis on discerning the man’s vocation. To this question he replied, “Oh, I’m a Christian who works in a meat-packing plant.”

The gospel was everything as far as Paul was concerned. verse 18 “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”

These believers, whose true citizenship was not on earth, but in heaven, were engaged in mortal combat with the authorities of Rome, in much the same way we are in our own day. However, they didn’t fight with weapons of warfare, but with good news – the proclaiming of Christ crucified – and with lives that proved they were “worthy of the gospel of Christ Jesus.”

2. What a Worthy Citizen Looks Like

People will always react in some way to us being Christians.

Philippian Christians couldn’t pledge allegiance to Caesar because they served a much greater, Lord. However it was seen as bordering on treason. In fact, the Christians of Paul’s day were occasionally accused of being atheists because their loyalty to Christ challenged the divinity of Caesar!

When the Philippians declared that their citizenship was in heaven, they were accused of being unpatriotic, and were therefore seen as a threat to the peace.

“So whether I come and see you or I am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one Spirit” (27b) Paul was calling on the believers to stand firm against the attacks on the gospel by drawing deep on the Holy Spirit and his work in their lives.

The first and immediate effect of their “standing firm in one Spirit” was for Paul to call them to cooperation, one with another: “with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”

Secondly, V28 “not to be frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”

As citizens of heaven, they might be tempted to ‘panic’ but we have the great comfort that God is in control, so we don’t need to be intimidated by anyone’s threats.

This will be, “a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God” (28b).

Don Carson: “Your change in character, your united stand in defence of the gospel, your ability to withstand with meekness and without fear the opposition that you must endure, constitutes a sign. The sign speaks volumes, both to the outside world and to the Christian community. It is a sign of judgement against the world that is mounting the opposition; it is a sign of assurance that these believers really are the people of God and will be saved on the last day.”

3. The Grace of Being a Worthy Citizen

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also to suffer for his sake” (29).

The verb “granted” should literally read “graced”, because it means “to give freely or graciously as a favour.” And this gift, this grace, is from God.

John 1:12-13: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Karl Barth says this, “The grace of being permitted to believe in Christ is surpassed by the grace of being able to suffer for him, of being permitted to walk in the way of Christ with Christ himself to the perfection of fellowship with him.”

“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

“They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name” (Acts 5:41).

They also share Paul’s experience: “engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have” (30)

If we are to grow as Christians – as Christ followers – then we need to understand that both salvation and suffering are gifts of grace from God and that both are necessary for discipleship and perseverance.

Paul’s call for all of us is clear – we are to let our manner of life, as citizens of heaven, be worthy of our calling. We have received the gospel call! Our sins have been paid for by Christ himself. One day, we will receive the crown of righteousness

We are to live as Paul did – putting the gospel first in all that we do; looking at everything we do in this life through the lens of the gospel. We do this together – as we stand firm in one Spirit, with one mind striving together, side by side, for the faith of the gospel. While we do this, there will be challenges, but we are not to panic, but rather rest in the assurance that God does all things well for his people.

As we stand together – as we strive by side – fearing no-one but God – as recipients of his twin grace of salvation and suffering, we will prove ourselves worthy of the gospel to which we have been called and that is what true citizenship of heaven looks like. May God help us as we strive to let our manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Hymn: Praise! 850

Take my life, and let it be
all you purpose, Lord, for me;
consecrate my fleeting days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

2 Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of your love;
take my feet, and let them run
with the news of victory won.

3 Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my lips, let them proclaim
all the beauty of your name.

4 Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold;
take my mind, that I may use
every power as you shall choose.

5 Take my motives and my will,
all your purpose to fulfil;
take my heart – it is your own,
it shall be your royal throne.

6 Take my love – my Lord, I pour
at your feet its treasure-store;
take myself, and I will be
yours for all eternity.

Frances R Havergal (1836-1879)

Closing Prayer