

Call to Worship

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (Ps 18:2)

Worship in song

Sing hymns and/or worship songs of your choice.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 8

Prayer of confession

Dear Lord, whilst we declare your lordship and delight in the plans you have for us, we also know our need for forgiveness.

You have called us to minister your hope to the world, but we have added to its hurt.

We have regrets and memories that haunt us.

We have acts of love which we have left undone.

We have been despairing of hope and small of vision.

Therefore, we show ourselves to you, hiding nothing, seeking your forgiveness.

Forgive us for choosing evil and condoning evil.

Forgive us for shirking our ministry when it cost us to be faithful.

Forgive us for not using our wealth and our skills to your glory.

Loving Father, we ask that we might become more Christlike in character and share in his mission to the world. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us ... he took it away, nailing it to the cross. (Col 2:13-14)

Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving Father,

We see in the cross the lengths you would go to rescue us back to yourself, and are amazed.

We see in the cross its cruelty, humiliation and burden of sin, and are amazed.

We see in the cross where uncompromising justice meets uncompromising love, and are amazed.

We see in the cross your commitment to love, planned before time began, and are amazed.

We see at the cross a dying thief who discovers your kingdom, and are amazed.

Thank you Father for the cross. Bless you Jesus for enduring it. Thank you Holy Spirit for applying it to our lives.

Holy Communion

Luke's gospel records the last supper Jesus had with his disciples as being a Passover meal. This meal celebrated the time when God's judgement "passed over" the Hebrew people.

Centuries earlier, God's people had been enslaved and cruelly abused in Egypt. As a result of this, God sent ten plagues of judgement on the land of Egypt. The last plague was the death of all first born animals and humans in the land. God told his people, through Moses, to take the blood of a lamb and smear it on the door posts of their huts. This would prevent the angel of death bringing God's judgement on those inside and the judgement of God would "pass over" them. Ever since that day, the Jews have celebrated the Passover day each year.

By making the last supper the Passover meal, Jesus was making it plain that the shedding of his blood on our behalf would cause God's judgement to "pass over" us. Our sins would be paid for by Jesus' blood.

Intriguingly, the ceremony of the Passover typically involved hiding half a loaf of bread. This was to symbolise the fact that the Messiah was still hidden and was yet to be revealed. It is therefore significant that Jesus takes the bread and instead of hiding it and eating the other half after a prayer of thanks to God, he says that the bread represents his body which would be broken and given in payment for the sins of all people (1 Cor 11:24). It was a dreadful prophecy about himself. It is significant, however, that there was no emphasis on hiding half the bread. This represents the truth that the Messiah is revealed and has given all of himself to us.

(Say a prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine which represents the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then share the bread and wine together.)

The Bible Reading

- Ezekiel 8:1-18

The Message: CLEAN UP YOUR TEMPLE

After the death of Alexander the Great, his kingdom was split into two. Essentially, there was the Greek-Syrian half, (known as the Seleucid empire), and then there was the Ptolemaic Empire which was centred on Egypt. Perhaps predictably, these two empires then spent the next few decades fighting each other.

One of the most successful Seleucid leaders was Antiochus the Great. He wrested control of the Palestinian region from the Ptolemies. After he died, his eldest son took over, but he was murdered. The murderer did not last very long because the king's younger son killed the murderer and took over the kingdom. The younger son then went on to murder his other brother in order to cement his claim to the throne. Once he was firmly in power, he

decided to call himself Antiochus Epiphanes, meaning “god manifest”¹ thereby equating himself with the god, Jupiter. He loved power... and nearly conquered the Egyptian Ptolemaic Empire but the military might of Rome restrained this ambition.

Antiochus Epiphanes had a hatred of the Jews as they refused to adopt Greek religion and culture. He therefore became determined to exterminate the Jewish religion. He attacked Jerusalem in 168 BC, and ordered that the temple be plundered and defiled. One of the things he did was to sacrifice a pig on the temple altar. He then set up an idol of Zeus in the temple and dedicated the temple to Jupiter, i.e. himself.

He was an evil man. He prohibited Jewish Temple worship and replaced the Jewish feasts with the drunken revelry of Bacchanalia—forcing the Jews to worship Bacchus, the god of pleasure and wine. Antiochus forbade circumcision on pain of death, sold thousands of Jewish families into slavery, destroyed as many copies of Scripture he could find, and slaughtered everyone discovered to be in possession of them. He reportedly killed 100,000 Jews... and employed every conceivable torture to force Jews to renounce their religion and embrace Greek culture.

But the thing I want to note is that Antiochus put stuff in the temple that had no right to be there... and he did so in outright defiance of the one true God.

For Antiochus, contemporary cultural ethics and spiritualities were more important than faith in the Hebrew God. Sadly, not much has changed today.

There is outright rebellion by many in the media and society’s opinion leaders against the values of God. The idea that marriage should be between a man and a woman is now seen as outdated. The idea that God has made people male and female is anachronistic. We should not teach our children the craft of being male and female... but should let our children decide themselves what sex they want to be, and to do so at a time when their sexuality is being formed, i.e. at a time they are most vulnerable.

One of the reasons our society is so godless is because the church has not given a clear and consistent lead. We have been divided in doctrine and morality. Far from leading the nation, we have trailed behind secular society, picking up the values they lead us into.

We therefore need to repent.

We’ve talked about having a temple polluted by political and social forces outside the church. Now let’s read about a time when the religious leaders themselves have polluted the temple.

The Temple – and the Church

In Ezekiel, chapter 6, we read of Ezekiel prophesying against the mountains of Israel where the Jews have set up idols to false gods in the high places. Ezekiel warns that God’s protective hand over them will be removed and they will be invaded by a foreign army because of the evil they are doing in worshipping other gods (Ezek 7:15).

¹ Antiochus’ eccentric and violent behaviour caused people to adulterate the epithet *Epiphanes* so that it became *epimanes* meaning “the mad one”.

In chapter 8, we read of a fiery angel who takes Ezekiel to the temple in Jerusalem and shows him where the Jews have installed false gods to worship. Ezekiel is shown a scene in which seventy elders of Israel are worshipping false gods secretly behind closed doors. He is then shown people in the inner court of the temple with their backs to the Holy of Holies, bowing down to worship the sun.

It is a tragic and terrible situation that calls for God's judgment. But as terrible and swift as this judgment is, worse is to follow. The final tragedy is that God removes his presence from his temple in Jerusalem (chapter 10). God decided that he would no longer dwell there. He will not share his glory with false gods who require the sacrifice of children.

This is a chilling reminder that God will not tolerate evil. As he warns in Revelation, he will remove his lamp-stand (i.e. his presence) from any church that loses its love of God (Rev 2:4-5). Today, God is cleaning up his church. We should not be surprised. The Bible says, *Judgment must begin in the house of God* (1 Pet 4:17). The church has been devastated by the evil it has allowed to go unchallenged within it and now God is using Royal Commissions to clean us up.

Church leaders have also been responsible for allowing other gods to be worshipped in our churches. I read of some churches in Sydney offering classes in Buddhism.

Sometimes, however, we who lead the church don't pollute God's temple with other gods, but with materialism. Some of us have turned God into a commercial venture. This was also happening in Jesus' time. Let me remind you by reading from John, chapter 2

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" (Jn 2:13-16)

It is important to remember that every activity that was taking place in the court of the Gentiles of the Temple was completely legal and was taking place under the direction of the religious leaders of Jesus' time. Nonetheless, it was wrong.

We who lead the church need to clean up the temple of God.

The Temple – and You

Finally, let's explore what the Bible says about cleaning up the temple of God – the temple that is 'us'. Each one of us is described in the Bible as being a temple, a temple in which God dwells by his Spirit. The apostle Paul says: *What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God* (2 Cor 6:16). He reminds us:

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies. (1 Cor 6:19-20)

So let me ask: Are we honouring God with our bodies?

CLEAN UP YOUR TEMPLE

Peter picks up the same theme and says that each one of us are like living stones, *being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.* (1 Pet 2:5)

Let's clean up God's temple and get rid of anything in it that should not be there.

Why?

Because we want the fullest and most intimate relationship possible with God.

The apostle Paul writes:

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them," and "I will be their God, and they will be my people." Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate," says the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor 6:16-18)

I stand before you as a very imperfect person. There are parts of me (God's temple) that harbors things which should not be there. But even in my weakness, I can honestly say that I *want* to be pure and dedicated to God's use only. I *want* God to live in me and to walk with me. I *want* that intimacy with God he promises.

So... believing in false gods, engaging in pornography, immorality, greed and selfishness – let's cut it out of our lives. Let's encourage each other to be as much like Jesus as we can. Let's cheer each other on and keep each other encouraged and accountable. Let's dare to be holy and ready for God to do what God wants to do through us and in us.

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 love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself;
May the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service.
May the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you this day and for evermore. Amen

This service was provided to HopeNet SA by Dr Nick Hawkes

KID'S CHURCH or KID'S TALK or SUNDAY SCHOOL

10 rules for successful living (the 10 commandments)

Exodus 20:1-17

You will need:

- 1) Lolly pop sticks (available at craft shops).
- 2) Felt tip pens able to write clearly on lolly pop sticks

Show the children where the story is in the Bible (Exodus 19-20) i.e. near the beginning, many years before Jesus came.

Explain:

1. The descendants of Abraham had grown to be a great people, the Hebrew people.
2. Sadly, they had all moved to the land of Egypt to escape a dreadful famine in their own land.
3. Sadly, the Pharaoh (king of Egypt) forced the Hebrew people to be his slaves and treated them cruelly.
4. Over the years, the Hebrew people forgot all about God.
5. After some generations, God sent Moses to rescue the Hebrew people from Pharaoh and lead them out of Egypt to journey to a land of their own. This journey was to take 40 years, a long time, the time God thought was necessary to teach his people to love and trust him.
6. When the Hebrew people are told that God exists, their first question is, "what is God like? What sort of God is he?... and most importantly, "what must I do to please this God?"
7. God told Moses to walk up to the top of Mount Sinai, and there God taught him what sort of God he was.
8. God taught Moses that God was holy, mighty and loving.
9. God taught Moses ten things the Hebrew people should do to please God. These ten things were scratched down on two pieces of stone.
10. If the people wanted to please God and live successfully, there were ten things they should do.
11. Here is a list of the ten rules for successful living, the ten things that God wants you to do.
 - 1) Do not believe in any other gods (one God)
 - 2) Do not have anything else that you worship (worship God only)
 - 3) Do not speak God's name in a bad way (don't swear)
 - 4) Do not fail to spend time with God (pray)
 - 5) Do not dishonour your parents (obey Mum and Dad)
 - 6) Do not murder (don't kill)
 - 7) Do not be unfaithful to your wife (be faithful)
 - 8) Do not steal (don't steal)
 - 9) Do not lie (don't lie)
 - 10) Do not envy (don't envy)

Write the key words (in the brackets above) on to lolly pop sticks which are cut in half. Try and tape one on each finger. It should become increasingly difficult and become quite funny. Talk about what each commandment means whilst people try and tape them to the ends of their fingers like giant fingernails.