

Faith of Gentile and Jew

1st Hymn A141 by C Wesley (T Richmond, T Haweis 1734-1820)

- 1) O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of our God and King, the triumphs of His grace!
- 2) My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim
To spread through all the earth abroad the honours of Thy name.
- 3) Jesus the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life and health and peace.
- 4) He speaks and listening to his voice new life the dead receive,
the mournful broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.
- 5) He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free,
His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood avails for me.
- 6) See all your sins on Jesus laid: the Lamb of God was slain,
His soul was once an offering made for every soul of man.

Prayer:

Dear Father, thank you for the opportunity to meet together as your people. We are always delighted that you always accept our worship, as well as our gifts, and we have this confidence because we meet in the name of our Saviour. Lead us this day we pray, and bring your word to our understanding, and build us up in our understanding of your truth, we pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

2nd Hymn by W Williams A478(Cum Rhondda, John Hughes 1873-1932)

- 1) Guide me O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak but Thou art mighty, hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore.
- 2) Open Thou the crystal fountain whence the living water flow;
Let the fiery cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through:
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer, be Thou still my strength and shield.
- 3) When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of deaths and hell's destruction land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises I will ever give to Thee.

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Readings:

- Isaiah 49:5-6
- Luke 7:1-10

Intercessions:

Dear Father,

We thank you for the freedoms with which you have blessed us in this land, where we are free to worship you. We are conscious of many places in this world where opposition is strong, where Christians are persecuted and hounded, even to death by brutal regimes! You know these places, and you know your "own", and we request on behalf of them that you protect them, enable them to be strong, and assist them to be totally faithful to you in spite of the threat! So we pray for encouragement and resilience in the midst of the danger.

We pray therefore for Iran, where brutality is normalised, and Christians attacked at any time. Protect them in the attacks, buoy them up, and give them liberally of your Holy Spirit and His power. Let their witness be strong and true. With this in mind, bring your power and aid to Your people in Nigeria where Islamic State attacks Christians, in Myanmar, North Korea, Congo and Uganda where this occurs!

We pray for Barnabas Aid who faithfully support such Christians - let their support be strong and faithful, and make their service effective and lasting.

We pray for Christian work in Nepal, and the faithful servants of yours who work there!

We pray for our own leaders, state and federal; give them clear minds and help them choose wisely and rightly. May they be conscious of the responsibility they carry. Grant wisdom and foresight to those who decide which immigrants to admit to our land, aware of our Judaeo-Christian foundation on which this country was founded.

We pray for those who have debilitating illness or cancer, or recovering from illness, or are depressed or lonely. Show them that you are the Eternal and good God who will not leave them or forsake them, and as Jesus himself assured us, that he will be with us to always even to the close of the Age! Thank you for this marvellous assurance. May it energise and encourage us all our waking moments. And so let your will be done in us and in this land. For we ask these prayers in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

3rd Hymn by H Bonar (T Vox Dilecti, J.B.Dykes 1823-76)

- 1) I heard the voice of Jesus say: Come unto me and rest!
Lay down thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast.
I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad,
I found in Him a resting place, and he has made me glad.
- 2) I heard the voice of Jesus say: Behold I freely give
The living water, thirsty one stoop down, and drink, and live!
I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream,
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.
- 3) I heard the voice of Jesus say: I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, thy morn shall rise, and all thy day be bright!
I came to Jesus and I found in Him my star, my sun,
And in that light of life I'll walk till travelling days are done.

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Address:

The story in today's reading from Luke is the sort of event that Luke loved to tell, viz. how the God of the Jews blessed a Gentile! Because by that time Luke and the Apostles knew that the blessing of God was meant for the whole earth! And this Gentile was important, a Roman Centurion, no less – a local Military Leader in the forefront of the Roman Empire which was occupying Palestine! He had jurisdiction over a hundred soldiers.

But he was clearly not your average Centurion! For a start he took notice of this travelling Preacher/Teacher of rising notoriety throughout Palestine. He would have taken even more notice of the fact that great crowds gathered to follow him wherever he went; centurions would have been sensitive to crowds – crowds would have required military presence if they became unruly. And he would have heard that works of power and miraculous healings had occurred in conjunction with Jesus' ministry. This man was not your average Rabbi! And this Centurion had a slave who was "dear to him" – also unusual! In those days slaves were simply chattels. Half of the Roman Empire was slaves! If one died you would simply get another one! (you didn't talk about the "sanctity of human life" in the Roman Empire!) This was different. This Centurion was worried about his slave – was it possible that this Teacher and Wonder-healer could save the life of the slave he loved?

This Centurion had shown a rare attitude to the Jews – he was concerned for their plight, as those under occupation. He even used his authority to have a Synagogue built for them. And finally he understood their system of administration and their culture, and so he sent a delegation of Jewish Elders to Jesus, a mark of honour to Jesus, this Rabbi whom the people regarded so highly. He knew this Rabbi was unlike all the gods Rome venerated!

These Elders pointed all this out to Jesus. They told him he was "worthy" to receive Jesus' attention, every bit as much as a true "son of Abraham"! (not that this fact would have swayed Jesus at all. He was "no respecter of persons". That is, he didn't have favourites based on peoples' background – he was impartial.)

And as someone sensitive to the traditions of the Jews, knowing that a Jew entering the house of a gentile would become ceremonially unclean, when he heard Jesus was coming to his house, he said he was not worthy of the Rabbi's visit. So he requested Jesus not to "come under his roof"! That way Jesus would not be embarrassed and rendered "unclean". But he recognized something about Jesus that the Jews themselves had failed to do! It seemed he was a secret believer. (cf Cornelius – a "God-fearer!")

The centurion indicated that he understood authority. He was a representative of the Emperor of the most powerful nation on earth. "I say to a man 'Go' and he must go, 'Come' and he must come, 'Do this' and it happens!" That was Roman authority!

(I hear him saying this: "But You have much greater power than I! You are a representative of a much greater Authority than mere Rome! You represent the Supreme Power of the Universe. You only have to speak a word and it will happen.")

Jesus was astounded! He 'marveled'. He turned around and said to the Jewish crowd following him "not even in Israel have I found such faith!" (Again I hear Him saying –How come this man, a foreigner from a pagan idolatrous nation understands who I am, when

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you, worshippers of the true God, do not?”) And so the slave was healed without Jesus even touching him – He didn’t even mention him!

The centurion had great faith!

Matthew’s version of the same event has Jesus saying “I tell you many will come from the East and the West [IE Gentiles] ...and recline at the table with the Patriarchs Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob (that is, having rich fellowship), while the rightful sons of the kingdom, heirs of the promises of God, will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth”; that is the lot of the sinners and the un-faithful!

Imagine how this went down with the crowd, all Jews?

Is there an equivalent situation applying today? I think there may be! Many of my generation went to church as a matter of convention – it was the “done thing”. Maybe someone hearing this is in that situation. Any of us who have heard the promises of God, and have not accepted the claims of the Lordship of Christ, but are simply traditional church attenders, hoping to be counted among the faithful, we are playing a dangerous game. Jesus said “I know my own, and my own know me.” He, the Good Shepherd, knows his sheep. He will know if you belong! In my church at Coro uniting in the last few years, we have had a number of Iranians, many of whom have become Christians, out of nominal Islam. When they came to Australia they thought they were coming to a country where everyone is a Christian. We have had to point out that that is not true, although we do have the fruit of Christians who have gone before us, and we mistakenly take our freedom for granted! Many of these Iranians love Jesus – they see believing in Him as coming out of the dark into the light, out of death into life. Do we? They have come from “the East and the West”, and come to Christ – as if this is the time for Iran and many other Muslim countries, but with great persecution. Yet there are people who come to in Australia only if they feel like it, if it is convenient, and if there is no important sports event on!

There is a danger of hearing the message of the grace of God, and NOT receiving it, not seeing it as the pearl of great price, and not believing in Jesus! Could many of us be like the traditional Jews in Jesus’ day, presuming “We are all sons of Abraham?” Do we presume we will be included in the Kingdom when the end comes. Could we be “pipped to the post” by “other outsiders”? Jesus is not the property of the Christian West (He was not an Anglo-saxon!) “God so loved the world ... that He sent Him ... so that whosoever believes ...”

I know of only two occasions when Jesus marveled. This is one, and when he visited his own home town of Nazareth (Mk 6:1-3), and taught them in their synagogue. They started saying nice things about him, but then they questioned “Where did he get all this knowledge and wisdom? We know him! He’s the carpenter, Mary’s son” - (normally they would have said he was Joseph’s son; is there possibly a hint here at his “illegitimate birth”? Anyway Joseph was probably dead) - “we know his brothers” (at least 4 named, and “his sisters” – not named, so at least 2). And so his village people “took offence at him!” And Jesus quoted a proverb “a prophet is not honored in his own hometown, among his own relatives and in his own household.” And then we read “There he could do no mighty work, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled at their unbelief!”

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So two things made him marvel – always in relation the phenomenon of faith. the astounding belief of a foreigner, and the surprising unbelief of those familiar with him, his own people!

So this turns out to be a story about believing! It was very important to Jesus. He spoke about it during the short period after his resurrection. So let us hear Him, and honour Him, and believe in Him! Amen

4th Hymn A207 by Henry Burton 1840-1930. T. Light Maurice Wolstenholm 1887-1959)

- 1) There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring
when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King;
Weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed so long,
but His triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.
- 2) In the fading of the starlight we can see the coming morn;
and the lights of men are paling in the splendours of the dawn;
for the eastern skies are glowing as with light of hidden fire,
and the hearts of men are stirring with the throbs of deep desire.
- 3) There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air,
and the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer;
for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit is the travail of His own.
- 4) Hark! we hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell,
'Tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our King, Immanuel;
Zion, go ye forth to meet Him, and my song be swift to bring
all thy sweetest and thy dearest for the triumph of our King!

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Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.

This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA