

Opening Prayer

Dear Father, we come as your people on this 1st day of the week, to worship you and hear your word to us. Thank you for this privilege, awarded us because of the work of your Son on our behalf. So lead us in our time together. We pray in His name, Amen.

First hymn Anon. 19th Century (*T Laudes Domini J Barnby 1838-96*)

- 1) When morning gilds the skies, my heart awaking, cries "may Jesus Christ be praised!
Alike at work and prayer to Jesus I repair: may Jesus Christ be praised!
- 2) Let earth's wide circle round in joyful notes resound: may Jesus Christ be praised!
Let air, and sea, and sky from depth to height reply: May Jesus Christ be praised!
- 3) Be this, when day is past, of all my thoughts the last, may Jesus Christ be praised.
The night becomes as day, when from the heart we say "May Jesus Christ be praised!"
- 4) Be this while life is mine, my canticle divine, "may Jesus Christ be praised.!"
Be this the eternal song through all the ages long, "May Jesus Christ be praised.!"

Prayers of intercession:

Dear Father,

We pray for the nations of the world, as encouraged by St. Paul to Timothy, for those in authority that indeed we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in every way. We pray for the King of our country, our constitutional monarch, King Charles. Grant that he may, conscious of his mother's strong stand for the Christian faith, pursue righteousness and justice, and that his life may follow his mother's dedication, finding perchance the reality of faith that she knew; that the formality of the format of his faith may become fresh and personal.

We pray for our local parliamentary leaders and the decisions they are required to make on our behalf from day to day. As we look to the nations of this world we see the constant tendency of these leaders to fall into disagreements with each other, the desire for power, and the quest for human glory, often at the expense of others with whom they converse. Grant them humility and respect for others, along with wisdom to give strong leadership in our affairs, that they may govern with good judgment and strength. In our own country, we thank you for the relative peace and security which have followed us since the two world wars. Continue to grant us this peace and security in our day, grateful for the good standards that are mostly ours in life.

Grant wisdom to those who deal in international affairs, and save us from the sin of presumption of "being the lucky country"! Bless those who preach Christian truth in our land; let them preach boldly without compromising your Word of Truth, and draw many who have not heard or those who have not responded to that word, that they may remember how short life can be and that we cannot predict tomorrow!

And now continue to lead us as we hear your Word that we may be wise in our hearing, and grateful for your abounding grace. For we pray these prayers in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ, Amen.

Readings:

- 2 Kings: 18:28-35
- Hebrews 12:1-4

Third hymn: (*T Praise my soul, John Goss 1800-80*)

- 1) Praise my soul the King of heaven to his feet thy tribute bring;
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like thee his praise should sing;
Praise him, praise him, hallelujah, praise the everlasting king.
- 2) Praise him for his grace and favour to our fathers in distress;
praise him still the same for ever, slow to chide and swift to bless:
- 3) Frail as summer's flowers we flourish, blows the wind and it is gone;
but while mortals rise and perish, he endures unchanging on.
- 4) Angels help us to adore him, ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon bow down before him, dwellers all in time and space:

Address: Hezekiah's Answer

King Ahaz of Judah was a bad man! Not only did he ignore the laws given by God to his ancestor Moses, but he made molten images for the Baals, and burned incense in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom. And he sacrificed in the high places, burning incense to foreign gods, "on every high hill, and under every green tree!" He cut the utensils of the house of the Lord in pieces, and shut the house of the Lord and made altars for himself in every corner of Jerusalem. He even *sacrificed* his own sons in the fire as had some of the nations Israel had driven out, whose practices were strictly forbidden to the Jews! And so "God gave him into the hand of the king of Aram", and he was defeated and many captives taken away. At one stage he sought help from the king of Assyria, because he was being invaded from all sides! This occurred because of the Lord's anger against them because of him. When he died they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel.

The rather astonishing thing is that his son Hezekiah, had a *different* heart and sought to restore all the correct worship, according to the ways of King David. He brought the priests and Levites back, asking them to sanctify themselves, and the house of the Lord, to repair the doors, and to carry out all the filth from the house of the Lord. He hewed down the Asherim (the wooden images of female gods) and broke down the high places and altars throughout all Judah, and restored the original worship to God. And he restored the tithes and offerings due to God. Thus Hezekiah did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God (2 Chron 31:21) Every work he undertook in serving the house of God was in accordance with the law and the commandments.

Now Sennacherib was the King of Assyria (705-681 B.C.) a powerful and aggressive warrior. Late in 702BC he defeated the Chaldeans, and won battles at Cutha and Kish. In the succession of Kings of Judah (Southern Kingdom) there were both good and bad kings. The bad ones, as we have just seen, demonstrated Samuel's *concern* about the Israelites having a king *at all* before even Saul had been chosen, believing that as God had told him, kings would often take the best young men, and the best land and produce, for their own forces and selfish interests, instead of trusting God. (God had said that *He* was their King!) Nevertheless God allowed Israel to have their request – they wanted to be like all the surrounding nations! There was no doubt that the prediction that concerned Samuel did occur as feared, and there were many bad kings and a sprinkling of good ones.

But Hezekiah was a good king, determined to oust the false worship which plagued Israel, and worship only Yahweh, and that only in the temple in Jerusalem. And Sennacherib came up against him, having made a name for himself by conquering all who stood against him. Hezekiah was about to be sorely tested! The Assyrians had invaded Judea, captured the northern kingdom (Israel) and Samaria after a 3 year siege. This was in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign. Sennacherib then took all the fortified cities of Judah, and Hezekiah was now in his sights. Rabshekeh was Sennacherib's senior official, and rather a "bully", and he addressed Hezekiah, hoping to frighten him into submission, as we read in today's reading.

Rabshekeh began to intimidate the people of Judea, by haranguing them, and regaling them with stories of all the other territories that Assyria had overcome, and rendered servants of Assyria. Such things as "Hear the word of the great King of Assyria – do not let Hezekiah deceive you; he will not be able to deliver you

Hezekiah's Answer

out of my hand! Do not let him make you rely on this *Lord* he talks about, telling you “the Lord will surely deliver you, and this city will not be given into the hand of the King of Assyria.” Do not listen to him, for thus says the King of Assyria “make your peace with *me*, and come out to *me* – then every one of you will eat of his own vine, and of his own fig tree, and drink water from his own well, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live and not die. [Like heck they would, I suspect!] So do not let him mislead you by saying ‘the Lord will deliver us’. Have any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the King of Assyria? So why would your God deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?”

And the people listened in silence. They spoke not a word for King Hezekiah had commanded “Do not answer him.” But there was still a response! Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshekeh!

When Hezekiah heard this he rent *his* clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth to the Prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz. They said to him “Thus says Hezekiah, this is a day of distress, rebuke, and disgrace; children have come to birth and there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the Lord heard all the words of Rabshekeh, whom the King of Assyria sent to mock the living God, therefore *lift up your prayer* for the remnant that is left.”

When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them “Say to your master ‘Thus says the Lord – do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard with which the servants of the King of Assyria have reviled me. Behold I will put a spirit in him so that he shall hear a rumour and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.’”

The lecture from Rabshekeh was renewed later, mentioning other triumphs which had happened under the iron hand of Assyria, saying “Behold you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, destroying them utterly. So will you be spared? Have the gods of these other nations which we have destroyed spared them? Where are their kings now? And Assyria wrote letters to cast contempt on the God of Israel.

Hezekiah received the letter from the hands of the messengers and read it; then he went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, and said: *“O lord, the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone of all the kingdoms of the earth, you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear O lord and hear; open your eyes O lord and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have devastated the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them. Now O lord our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God.”*

Then Isaiah, the son of Amoz, sent to Hezekiah saying “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to me about Sennacherib King of Assyria, I have heard you. This is the word that the Lord has spoken against him (and his prophetic word came as divine verse):

‘She (Israel) has despised you and mocked you, the virgin daughter of Zion;

She has shaken her head behind you, the daughter of Jerusalem.

...Whom have you reproached and blasphemed?

And against whom have you raised your voice, and haughtily lifted up your eyes?

...Against the Holy One of Israel!

Through your messengers you have reproached the Lord,

And you have said “With my many chariots I came up to the heights of the mountains,

To the remotest parts of Lebanon;

And I cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypresses....

I dug wells, and drank foreign waters, and with the sole of my feet, I dried

Up all the rivers of Egypt. (remember the Exodus)

Have you not heard? Long ago I did it; from ancient times I planned it.

Hezekiah's Answer

*Now I have brought it to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps.
Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength,
They were dismayed and put to shame;
They were as the vegetation and the green herb,
As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up.
But I know your sitting down, your going out and your coming in,
And your raging against Me. Because of your raging against Me,
And because your arrogance has come to My ears,
Therefore I will put my hook in your nose, and my bridle in your lips,
And I will turn you back by the way which you came."*

"The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem will go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the lord will perform this.

Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria –

"He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield, or throw up a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came, by the same way he will return, and he shall not come into this city." declares the Lord. "For I will defend this city to save it for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake".

"Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold there were dead bodies everywhere! So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. And it came about as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroc his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons slew him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place."

Thus records 2 Kings, as well as 2 Chronicles and also Isaiah the Prophet!

When I was in Intermediate, due to sit my first public exam, in 1954 at Unley High School, an English teacher gave us a poem which stuck in my memory. 68 years later, I cannot remember the English teacher, but here is the poem:

*The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.*

*Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.*

*For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!*

*And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.*

*And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.*

*And the widows of Asher are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;*

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*And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!*

(“The Destruction of Sennacherib” by George Gordon (Lord Byron)).

This history of ancient Israel acts as a good reminder that our God is not like some modern promulgation in the vein of “gentle Jesus meek and mild”, a rather common and current view. And He is sovereign, very powerful, and tolerates ungodly behaviour from humanity until it is “filled up”, after which He judges in justice, sometimes using His own servants to fulfil His will.

Amen.

Hymn by J Howe 1819-1910. (T Battle Hymn American Camp Meeting Song 1861)

- 1) Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.
- 2) He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat:
O be swift my soul to answer him; be jubilant my feet!
Our God is marching on.
- 3) He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave;
He is wisdom to the mighty, he is succour to the brave;
so the world shall be his footstool, and the soul of time his slave:
Our God is marching on.

Benediction:

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you without blemish before the presence of His glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen.

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