

Prayer

Come. Lord Jesus, heal the sick amongst us. Heal the sick of mind who do not understand what life has done to them and need release; heal the sick of body who suffer with conditions which they do not know how to handle; heal the sick of heart who long for peace and cannot find it until they rest in You; and heal the sick of spirit who do not know if they can trust You for their health. Heal us all, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Burma

We have not often taken current news as the theme for these prayers, but it is time for this to change. The tragedy unfolding in Burma deserves the prayer of every Christian soul as people struggle for their lives, in some cases unnecessarily because aid which could have been sent to them has not been accepted. Pray for the Lord to work a miracle of aid for Burma.

Meditation

Rejoice my soul, rejoice in Him

Who gives us rain and crops, and fills our stores;
And pours His love and grace on us to bring us health and light.

Rejoice my soul, rejoice in Him

Who gives us family and friends, and special festivals;
And grants us all an inheritance of faith and hope and love.

Rejoice my soul, rejoice in Him

Who gives us victory over death and sin and hell;
And makes us truly glad to know we have eternal life.

Rejoice my soul, rejoice in Him

Who gives us entry to the presence of our God;
And builds our faulty characters through suffering to faith.

Rejoice my soul, rejoice in Him

Who gives inspiring happiness, the spirit of real joy;
And seals the future with His blood, and comes again in glory!

Bible Study - Ephesians 2:7-10

⁷ All this has happened so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace by means of His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this does not come from you, it is the gift of God, ⁹ it is not a result of things done lest anyone should boast, ¹⁰ for we are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus for the good deeds God has previously prepared for us to live by.

Review

Paul continues his great explanation of salvation which begins at the beginning of chapter 2, the first half of which we read yesterday. Ephesians 2:1-6 and 2:7-10 are both part of the same lengthy sentence, but I have spilt it into two so that we can

concentrate upon each part, explore it fully, and dwell on its truths. The whole passage emphasises God's power and ability to bring about His own plan of salvation in the world. God is the sole creator and authority behind the Universe, and He alone is able to bridge the gap which exists between Himself and His creation because of sin. As we saw yesterday, sin is the one uniting factor of all humanity throughout time and space, whether originating in the heart of a man or woman or in the evil deeds of Satan.

The words Paul uses to talk about the saving power of God throughout this passage are majestic, and by themselves, they ooze confidence and certainty. Paul speaks of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus when he says 'All this has happened so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace ...' He was deeply conscious that the young church of his day bore the testimony of the single life and death of Jesus Christ which God had ordained to change the world for ever; it was a serious responsibility. Verse 7 anticipates the amazing growth and extension of the Kingdom of God throughout the world over what we now know to be at least two thousand years of human history, and still the 'riches of His grace' are not exhausted! As I look around me and see something of the many thousands of people who live near me or cross my path, the great majority of whom have decided to say no to the church and to Jesus Christ, for reasons perhaps only they can ever say, I am forced to think. I must sometimes remind myself that the faith I have so graciously received is no private thing, for the heart of Christ which has found me is as much concerned for every one of the several billion people in the world who as yet will not tolerate the mention of His name. It is extraordinary; God has a heart for all these people, and this is the measure of His kindness (2:7).

Paul goes on to extend what he said previously at the end of verse 5 by adding 'faith' to his working definition of salvation; 'for by grace you have been saved through faith' (2:8). We grasp the truth of what Christ has done for us by faith, for there is no other way to respond to the deeds of God or His desire to have a relationship with us. God is Spirit, and we are His mortal creatures who are bound by the limitations of the world He has made, however wonderful and glorious we perceive it to be. Just as Abraham decided by an act of will to trust what he believed God was saying to him and accept the promises made to him by God, so can we. If we have heard something of the 'Good News' of God in Jesus Christ, then we are given a choice simply through the act of hearing this; we either accept it or reject it. When we accept it, we do so in faith, trusting that God will do what He has said. So what started out as the pure gift of God is met with our conscious willing ascent to all He has done for us; this is the beginning of the road of salvation.

Some people talk about the moment of their 'salvation' as if it were something they achieved by making a decision, but Paul sweeps this aside. Such an attitude will not do. Before God, there is nothing in our deeds which deserve merit, for our pride and joy should be in the Lord and not in the circumstances of our decision to believe. Testimony is a powerful thing, and it is vital that we encourage and use testimony today; it is a good way of humanising worship which has become for many people something spiritually strange, distant or taxing. However, in true testimony, the emphasis is on the Lord and not the one giving testimony; people should be left praising God, not queuing to talk to the one who has given testimony.

Our highest duty is to give glory to God, and when we are saved, we 'give Him all the glory!' We even ascribe our faith to Him rather than say that there is any credit for us in having taken the decision to follow Jesus (2:8,10). In that spirit, we are made 'new people', and by the power of God's Spirit, enabled to live according to the plan He has for our lives, and not according to our own will. This is our salvation and our faith.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you find it possible to imagine how God might love the billions of people He has made individually and with the same care for everyone?
2. Discuss in your group what it means to say 'by grace I have been saved by faith'.
3. Paul says that God has created us for good deeds (2:10). What good deeds has He made you for?

Discipleship

If you have not done this already, look at the third of the questions above. It is easy for Christian people to take on board a sense of responsibility for almost everything, but the Lord is very careful with us and is also very specific in what He requires of us. You may be involved in all manner of things, but what has He specially given you to do? You can measure this in terms of 'church work' if you wish, but far better to look at your whole life and ask the Lord what He intends for you in terms of work, family, church and every other aspect of your life. Let Him rule in your life today!

Final Prayer

Glorious Lord, sieve out the rubbish from my over-cluttered life. Refresh my spirit and restore my soul by helping me to see what is superfluous and unhelpful to my walk of faith with You. Draw me closer, Lord Jesus, draw me closer. AMEN