

Alton Baptist Church e-Service 2nd May 2021

God speaks, things happen

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You that whether we are in the church building together or thinking about You alone, You are with us and hear our prayers. Help us to know You as You know us, and to love You as you Love us. We pray that this time spent in Your presence may be pleasing to You and a blessing for us.

Amen

Some words of encouragement from God in these troubled times.

Reading: Isaiah 41:10

¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Reading: Jeremiah 17:7-8

⁷ 'But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.
⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.'

Song: My hope is built on nothing less –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x42r53W5wWY>

We hope that the vaccines will help with the Covid-19 pandemic, but our trust should be first and foremost in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. It is Jesus who guarantees our future life.

It is Jesus who can calm our fears, no matter what we face.

Prayers - In your own words just praise and thank the Lord, for who He is, for what He is, for what He has done. Confess your need of forgiveness. Acknowledge the price Jesus paid; so that justice might be served, yet our sins forgiven. He died that we might live.

Song: Seek ye the Lord (Peace like a river) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oY9bwy-pEQ>

Prayers of Praise, Thanks and Intercession
Pray as you feel led.

Reading: Isaiah 55:1-7 *Invitation to the thirsty*

55 'Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;

and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?

**Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.**

³ **Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live.**

I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.

⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
a ruler and commander of the peoples.

⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not,
and nations you do not know will come running to you,
because of the Lord your God,

the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendour.'

⁶ **Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.**

⁷ **Let the wicked forsake their ways
and the unrighteous their thoughts.**

**Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.**

Some Thoughts:

This passage is in a section on the future glory of Zion. Our God is the Holy One of Israel. The Jews are His chosen people and serve as an example to us. Replacement theology has taught that the church has replaced the Jews in God's affection, but this is a false teaching, possibly partly inspired by the dispersion of the Jews, but more likely by the raging hatred that Satan has for the Jews.

As Christians we should recognise that the Jews are the root and we are grafted in branches (as explained in Romans 11). So it is not inappropriate for us to claim the blessings God has for His people.

See Isaiah 56:8 ⁸The Sovereign Lord declares – he who gathers the exiles of Israel: 'I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.'

We are in an interesting time in history, because God has gathered nearly seven million Jews in the land of Israel. A bigger Exodus than the one from Egypt. Israel's total population is over nine million.

But we know that most of the Jews in Israel are still not followers of Jesus, just like most Jews and Gentiles outside Israel. So Isaiah's message to listen, to seek and to forsake applies to all people. Even those of us who are followers of Jesus, would do well to continue to listen, seek and forsake.

Listen that we might live. Seek that we might find. Forsake, turn (repent) and be pardoned.

Note that God offers His pardon freely. Why labour for what does not satisfy. Just listen to Him and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Song: The word of God is light in my darkness -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waUt8Ktk5no>

Reading: Isaiah 55:8-13

⁸'For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,'
declares the Lord.

⁹'As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ As the rain and the snow
 come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
 without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
 so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
¹¹ **so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
 it will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
 and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**

¹² You will go out in joy
 and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
 will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
 will clap their hands.

¹³ Instead of the thorn-bush will grow the juniper,
 and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the Lord's renown,
 for an everlasting sign,
 that will endure for ever.'

Some More Thoughts

Perhaps it would be better just to focus on the Lord's thoughts, rather than my thoughts. We find God's thoughts expressed throughout the Bible, so this is why it is essential for Christians to read all the way through the bible as often as possible. There is too much to cover in our Sunday services.

This passage tells us that His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. This is why we have difficulty in understanding where God is in certain situations, or why He allows things to happen, or even what he plans to happen next. Many of His plans for the future are described in the prophetic parts of the bible, but the timing remains unclear.

We can be confident however, that if He has said He is going to do something, He will do it. When He speaks, things happen but not always how we expect or when we expect.

Sticking with the theme of the Jews being an example to us. We can see that in recent history, God has made it possible for many Jews to escape from the former Soviet Union (FSU) and travel to Israel. There was a long period when this was very difficult and those who tried were called Refuseniks – they were refused permission to leave. With the unexpected fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 many were able to leave and there are now over a million Jews from the FSU.

As we wait to see how God's plans unfold, it will be informative to watch what happens to the over seven million Jews in the United States. What will inspire them to leave America for Israel and when will it happen? Will they go out in joy and be led forth in peace? Let's hope so.

As Christians, we should do our best to follow Jesus wherever He leads us with joy and peace in our hearts as we await His return.

Song: God is working His purpose out -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ms9Fu-O8ZHU>

Grace

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us now and always.
AMEN