

Prayers

Opening prayer

The beauty of Your world astounds me, Lord God, but the cruelty of humanity also shocks me. Help me therefore to live not by the standards of this world, but according to Your Word, the world's only truth, the yardstick of honesty, the arbiter of integrity and the revealer of Your compassion and redeeming love. Shine Your light into our disillusioned world, Lord God, and make Your salvation known to all, we pray: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: The Future

1. For yourself

Pray about the future as you currently see it, and as it applies to you. To what extent is your picture of the future governed by your faith in God?

2. For your friends and family

Pray for your family and those who are close to you, and pray about what the immediate future holds for you. Pray for the Lord's guidance.

3. For the church and its work

Ask the Lord for His guidance for the church or fellowship to which you belong. Pray that God's people will always be willing to do His will

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for the future of the world and the financial markets in particular, insofar as the effect the whole of the world economy

Meditation

Was there no one brave enough or powerful enough
To stand for fallen people before the throne of grace,
But You, Lord Jesus; God's Son?

Was there no one humble enough or gracious enough
To understand the depths of human sin and misery,
But You, Lord Jesus; our Advocate?

Was there no one good enough or strong enough
To deal with all the sin and sickness in the world,
But You, Lord Jesus; God's Anointed?

Was there no one wise enough or sincere enough
To speak the truth about everything with total honesty,
But You, Lord Jesus; Light of the World?

Was there no one human enough and divine enough
To forge a righteous way for people to find their God,
But You, Lord Jesus; Our Saviour?

Glory be to You! For You have done all things well!

Bible Study

Bible passage – Joshua 5: 10-15

¹⁰ While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal they kept the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ On the day after the Passover, that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and roasted grain. ¹² Now, the manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites that year, for they ate the produce of the land of Canaan.

¹³ It so happened that while Joshua was near to Jericho, he looked up and saw a man facing him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him,

‘Are you one of us, or one of our opponents?’

¹⁴ He replied,

‘No, I have come because I am a commander of the army of the LORD.’

Joshua fell with his face to the ground in obeisance, and he said to him,

‘What does my lord have to say to your servant?’

¹⁵ The commander of the army of the LORD said to Joshua,

‘Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.’

And Joshua did so.

Review

Israel have now entered the Promised Land. They have crossed the Jordan into Canaan (Joshua 3,4) and been purified by circumcision (5:1-9); and they stand ready for the great task ahead of them, which is to take possession of Promised Land. Joshua was ready with an army of more than forty thousand at Gilgal, near the city of Jericho, and Israel was ready to begin the task of occupation and go to war against those already living in the land. However, before going into action, scripture records two incidents with symbolic importance; the first Passover in the Promised Land, and the meeting of Joshua with an angelic messenger near to Jericho.

A number of significant changes took place in the lifestyle of God’s people as they moved from living in the desert to the more fertile land of Canaan. Most poignant and symbolic of these was the change of food from the Lord’s desert provision of manna to the ‘produce of the land’ in Canaan (5:11). When the people of Israel were introduced to ‘manna’, they were not enamoured of God’s strange provision (Ex 16:31f.) and if they were to benefit from eating it they had to strictly observe the commands they were given about gathering it (Numbers 11:6f.); yet after a difficult start, they managed to sustain their obedience for forty years. In celebration of the end of their desert travails, Joshua and the people of Israel celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land, and the meal which formed the heart of this celebration was of unleavened bread, and what our passage calls ‘roasted grain’ (5:11).

A meal of grain is not what we might expect for a Passover meal, however, for when the people of Israel came out of Egypt, the meal was celebrated with a sacrificed lamb. The slaughter of the lamb was a sign of God’s redemption and deliverance, but although this was symbolic of the people’s escape from Egypt, the feast of ‘the produce of the land’ in Canaan was a celebration of God’s promise to bring His people safely to the Promised Land. This change in the Passover meal is a reminder to us that it came to be used in Israel to celebrate not just the one act of deliverance from Egypt, but the on-going work of God amongst His people, and His continual meeting of their need. The Christian interpretation of Passover is that Christ died once as a ‘Passover Lamb’ for the salvation and redemption of all humanity. However, our celebration of this now takes the form of a meal of ‘bread and wine’, celebrated regularly as ‘the Lord’s Supper’ or ‘Communion’, more like Joshua’s Passover in the Promised Land!

The second incident in our passage today is part of scripture’s build up to the story of the battle of Jericho (chapter 6). The appearance to Joshua of an angelic messenger with drawn sword (5:13-15) reminds us of two previous incidents in Scripture, firstly, the tussle between Jacob and a stranger at Peniel (Gen 32:22-32), and the calling of Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:1f.). There is no exact connection to either, but the incident contains elements of both. Joshua, like Jacob, stood on the verge of achieving his godly commission, but whereas Jacob had yet to learn to trust God and struggled with the stranger he met, Joshua knew what he was doing and bowed down in worship to this stranger from God (5:14). The connection with Moses is in verse 15, where Joshua is told to remove his sandals because the ground on which he walked was holy (it was the Promised Land). However, whilst Moses argued with God at the burning bush (see Exodus 3,4), Joshua asked the angel for his message (5:14). It is generally reckoned that the messenger went on to give instructions for the battle of Jericho (6:2f.).

For us, however, Joshua represents one who was an obedient servant of the Lord, ready to do God's will, whatever it might entail. His meeting with the man with a drawn sword is mysterious, but Joshua was not distracted, and the connections with Jacob and Moses would have reassured him that what he was about to embark on was indeed God's will. When we begin some work for the Lord, He will be there, protecting us spiritually and fighting alongside us. As we will discover in the coming chapters of Joshua, God's people will succeed if they are obedient, but if they turn away from His will, then they will fail. The presence of the Lord is essential for all our endeavours.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What does the celebration of the 'Lord's Supper mean to you, and in what ways does it connect with Passover?
2. Have you ever been called to do some special work for God? What have you felt like just prior to this, and how has God reassured you?
3. Discuss what these incidents meant to the people of Israel as they entered the Promised Land.

Discipleship challenges

- *Explore what the Communion service means in your church tradition, either by looking it up, using the internet, or by talking to a church leader. Make sure you understand what the teaching of the church is, and reflect on how this relates to your own experience.*
 - *Pray that God will inspire His people today by visiting them in ways that they will understand, as the armed messenger was to Joshua. Pray that God will use His people do battle for what is good and right in our world today.*
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Final Prayer

Speak to me, Lord Jesus, when I do not know where to turn, and need Your help. Send Your Holy Spirit and fill me with Your love and peace so that I may find my way to true faith; and in that confidence, deal with all my problems in Your strength. Thank You Lord Jesus, my Saviour; AMEN
