

18th February, 2024

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe,

light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
vast, unmeasured, boundless, free,
rolling as a mighty ocean
in its fullness over me.

Underneath me, all around me,
is the current of Thy love;
leading onward, leading homeward
to Thy glorious rest above.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
spread His praise from shore to
shore!
How He loveth, ever loveth,
changeth never, nevermore!

How He watcheth o'er His loved
ones,
died to call them all His own;
how for them He intercedeth,
watcheth o'er them from the
throne.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
love of every love the best;
'tis an ocean vast of blessing,
'tis a haven sweet of rest.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
'tis heav'n of heav'ns to me;
and it lifts me up to glory,
for it lifts me up to Thee.

The Sermon by Rev. Howard Wright.

Read Nehemiah 6:1-16, Luke 18:31-33 – Courage & Success

Today the city wall is finished (6:14). It was about 1.7 miles long, and included about 10 gates and at least 8 towers.

The walls are symbolic to us of the need to have a defined identity as the people of God. God has given us boundaries of behaviour and attitudes, a safe and life-giving space. Rather like the fence around our own gardens is not a restraint but a barrier which keep us safely in and the danger safely out. Our identity is as children of God, called to take on the family likeness. To become like Jesus in attitude and behaviour (Romans 8:29). Each biological family has different characteristics, likewise each spiritual family too – read 1 Corinthians 15:49.

In the Old Testament, Jerusalem was supposed to be the dwelling place of God to which all the peoples of earth would come to encounter God. Now, today, we, as individuals and collectively, are the dwelling place of God and where the presence of God needs to be seen.

Jerusalem needed to be restored, and so might we, both as individuals and as a church family.

Last week, Andy spoke about the threat to the project from inside. This week, the threat to the project is from the outside.

The devil is desperate to stop us serving God. He's a master at diversions and even appears as an angel of light, pretending to represent God. But his tactics are known and we are to be on our guard. Read 1 Peter 5:8. Similarly, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, the rulers of the surrounding nations, are anxious to stop the Jews regaining and becoming secure in their identity, as God's people. They feared for their own wealth and status.

There are three things to learn from Nehemiah.

Firstly, stay focussed. Nehemiah, knew what his job was and he was not going to be diverted from it. Nehemiah receives an invitation from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. He's right to be suspicious – but it's a pleasant invitation – a meeting in the country retreat of Ono, a few days off, being wined and dined, a chance to recharge the batteries – but if you'll forgive the pun, Nehemiah went 'oh-no!'

What's your direction? What has God called you to, in your personal walk with him, and in the tasks he has for you. Jesus was fixed, Luke 9:51, which he knew would lead to his death.

Nehemiah replies to the invitation with a clear statement and acknowledgement of his responsibility – I'm committed to a great project, I cannot

abandon my post. For Nehemiah, the project even greater than he immediately realised. As Andy pointed out last week, it was to prepare the city for the coming of the King – King Jesus.

We are committed to a great project. We are to prepare for the return of the King, to get others ready and to be ready ourselves, by our personal transformation into the likeness of Jesus! God is calling this world back to himself, and we are the spokespersons, the ambassadors, the visual aids, of the Kingdom of God. We cannot abandon our posts – this is a life or death issue.

We are to stay focussed, and secondly, we are to stand firm. Read Ephesians 6:10-14. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, the rulers of the surrounding nations upped the pressure on Nehemiah sending an accusatory letter – see vs. 6-7.

These are serious accusations and create a huge risk to Nehemiah, but Nehemiah dismisses the accusation: *'Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.'* And he prays: *'Now strengthen my hands.'*

Dwight L. Moody, the American evangelist of the late C19 once said, *"If I take care of my character, God will take care of my reputation."* Read 1 Peter 2:12. We may be accused, and the accusation may be right, in which case, make a confession and issue an apology, but leave it then with God. We can be confident in the God who calls us by name, who identifies as beloved children, princesses and princes of the Kingdom of God. *And if God is for us, who can be against us* (Romans 8:31) So, we are stay focussed, stand firm, and thirdly, we are to stay fearless. Someone pointed out that that command to 'Fear not!'

Nehemiah visits a known prophet and receives a warning and recommendation. God still speaks supernaturally through prophecy today, but the Bible is very clear about testing all prophecies. No true prophet of God will claim infallibility, and we should be cautious if anyone claims 'thus says the Lord', or 'the Lord has told me.' We are to reflect on any prophetic word and include other mature Christians in that careful, and prayerful assessment. Nehemiah assesses the message he has been given and realises this is a trap.

To have hidden in the temple, would have, interrupted the work, been a poor example to the rest of the people, but most importantly been directly disobedient to God's biblical command about the sanctity of the temple – only priests were to enter. No genuine 'word of God' will ever contradict the Word of God – the Bible.

Let us, like Nehemiah, stay focussed, stand firm, and stay fearless.

The 1st Sunday of Lent: Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat: Feb 21st at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: Feb 21st at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Feb 28th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: Sunday March 24th at 3.00pm.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.
- COGS Tots and Tinytots are on Mondays.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.