

“God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Today's readings for your perusal are: Psalm 13, Romans 6: 12-23 and Matthew 10: 40-42.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY – WHAT A PRIVILEGE

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Wonderful words from the hymns of Ira D Sankey. Yet profound words which inspire the soul, that gives comfort when it is needed and hope when there seems none. The words of this hymn talk about faith and trust in God. We know as Christians that faith and commitment to service is important if we are to live a good Christian life. It means struggling on against sin, against temptation and keeping our eyes on Jesus to keep us from straying. God of course knows how difficult life is for us and he knows what he asks of us, to serve Him and trust in Him, for He provides for us, the reason we can trust Him is because God sacrificed his only begotten Son for us

Paul exhorts us to recognise who we now are in Christ and to put that new identity into effect by putting sin behind us. This victory over sin is possible only through Christ because he is our saviour and our friend. He is our Lord and our strength when times are hard. That is why we have lots of hymns, which sing about Jesus' wonderful love for us.

Paul wrote about the human problem of suffering because of our sin, our wrongdoings, our wrong belief that we can do what we want and ignore God's word. Paul tells us: *12 Sin must no longer rule in your mortal bodies, so that you obey the desires of your natural self. 13 Nor must you surrender any part of*

yourselves to sin to be used for wicked purposes. Instead, give yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life, and surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes. He further goes on to tell us that 14 Sin must not be your master; for you do not live under law but under God's grace.

He realises that we do struggle with sin, we do falter, and we do fail. For Paul, sin is both something we choose and a power we cannot resist. Any addict will confirm that is true. Freedom from sin is therefore liberation from a very powerful and damaging force. For some people, the change from bondage to freedom in Christ happens very quickly, but for most it is a slow and gradual process, so that though we believe, we are still drawn to sin. **16** *Surely you know that when you surrender yourselves as slaves to obey someone, you are in fact the slaves of the master you obey - either of sin, which results in death, or of obedience, which results in being put right with God. 17 But thanks be to God! For though at one time you were slaves to sin, you have obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received. 18 You were set free from sin and became the slaves of righteousness.*

In his letter to the early Christians in Rome Paul states “*sin shall not be your master*” and he speaks in the future tense deliberately to show us the modern day reader that sin will not rule or have dominion over us again because of our faith and trust in Christ. We are taught that we Christians, followers of Christ, are no longer under the old Mosaic Law, or Torah, as our Jewish ancestors were. It’s simply because Jesus came into the world to change all of that and because of Christ we have received God’s eternal grace and love, for grace reigns through the love of Christ which brings about righteousness and eternal life for all of us who believe and accept Him as Lord and Saviour.

Paul goes on to say: **19** *(I use everyday language because of the weakness of your natural selves [our human nature].) At one*

time you surrendered yourselves entirely as slaves to impurity and wickedness for wicked purposes. In the same way you must now surrender yourselves entirely as slaves of righteousness for holy purposes. 20 When you were the slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. 21 What did you gain from doing the things that you are now ashamed of? The result of those things is death! 22 But now you have been set free from sin and are the slaves of God. Your gain is a life fully dedicated to him, and the result is eternal life. 23 For sin pays its wage - death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord. The gospel reminds us of who we truly are and invites us to live up to that Freed Children of Christ. Yet Paul asks the question, if we are not under the law does that mean we can do what we want that we do not need to obey any laws or rules? No, it does not, and Paul warns us that habitual sinning, would and does put us back into the hold of sin. In other words, we suddenly become slaves to sin all over again, and all because we did not have the faith to stand firm and deny sin its chance.

The Bible teaches us that we do not follow the Mosaic Law or the false teachings of this world because Christ has placed his own Law into our hearts and souls! Instead of being slaves to sin, we are now slaves to righteousness and to God! Slave is a bad word though, it tends to convey the impression of someone who is chained up and who is forced into back breaking labour, but that is not the picture that Paul paints of a life of service to God. Instead we read and are taught that Jesus died alone on a wooden cross for our sakes. He freely gave up his life so that the devils hold on the earth would be broken. His death was not the end, as some would have us believe but was only the beginning. For Christ triumphed on the cross of Calvary and he bought us our freedom by destroying the chains of sin.

For like Jesus, Paul insists that true freedom is to be found only in a relationship our Heavenly Father who created us. Only by bending the knee to God can we, you and I become what God originally intended us to be: righteous (conforming to God's

standards of behaviour) and holy (living in a way that is God centred and world renouncing). The outcome of these is eternal life in and through Christ Jesus our Lord. The 'gospel' message receives a glad reception in our hearts and gives us the assurance of eternal life which in turn brings joy and a fulfilment to our lives. That is why Jesus refers to us as his children because God's grace goes beyond our deserving. **40** *"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes God's messenger because he is God's messenger, will share in his reward. And whoever welcomes a good man because he is good, will share in his reward.* It is because of us that people receive Christ and it is through us that they also receive the one who sent him - God! That is our task, that is what we have to do because as the old Sankey hymn puts it:
Jesus know our every weakness...

Precious Saviour, still our refuge...

In His arms He'll take and shield thee
Thou wilt find a solace there.

Do not be afraid, stand tall and serve the Lord for He is with us.

PRAYER

Thank you Father for giving us the gift of music, and for blessing us with wonderful hymn writers who are able to take your words and put them to music so that we can sing our praises to you in heaven. For music is a precious gift that heals and soothes the troubled soul and when we link that to the power of prayer then it is amazing what can be achieved. Help us Lord to come to you through our prayers so that we can find our solace in you. Especially in times of trouble and worry as many find themselves in at this time.

When we are down Lord let us recall our favourite hymns of praise to you, let us remember our favourite Bible verses and lessons and through them find our peace. We pray today Lord that you will bless all those key workers, the men and women who provide us with food, heating and lighting and who care for us when we are ill and not forgetting all those who protect us our emergency services workers. Bless them and their families, keep them safe just as we ask you to keep us and our friends and families safe.

Bring wisdom to our leaders so they can make the wise and correct decisions that will get our country back on its feet, help the doctors and scientists to find a cure for Covid 19. We pray for strength, wisdom and patience for the people of our country so that rash decisions will not be made and people kept safe. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.