

Sight for the Blind

Sunday 22 August 2021

Call to Worship

Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!

My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD;

My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favour and honour.

No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.

O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

The Church's One Foundation

S J Stone

The church's one foundation

is Jesus Christ, our Lord;

we are a new creation

by water and the Word.

From heav'n he came and taught us

what perfect love can be;

through life and death he sought us,

and rose to set us free.

The church in ev'ry nation

is one through all the earth;

our charter of salvation,

one God, one faith, one birth;

one name together blessing,

one holy food we share,

to one hope ever pressing,

at one in work and prayer.

Still, schisms, tribulation,

and hatred fuel our war;

we wait the consummation

of peace forevermore.

The saints their watch are keeping;

their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

Yet we on earth have union
with God, the Three in One,
and mystic, sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
Oh, happy ones and holy!
God, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
may live eternally.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Our prayer and reflection are combined as one. The words of the Taizé chant
at once a foreground and also background to our own prayers.

Jesus remember me
When you come into your kingdom

We bring our personal confessions before the Lord
May the Lord of the Sabbath enfold you, forgive you and strengthen you
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Notices

The Peace

God of Wonders

Chris Tomlin

Lord of all creation
Of water, earth, and sky
The heavens are Your tabernacle
Glory to the Lord on High

God of wonders beyond our galaxy
You are holy, holy
The universe declares Your majesty
You are holy, holy

Lord of heaven and earth
Lord of heaven and earth

Early in the morning
I will celebrate the light
And as I stumble through the darkness
I will call Your name by night

Hallelujah to the Lord of heaven and earth

Reading Jonah 3:1-10

Conversion of Nineveh

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

⁶When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ⁸Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. ⁹Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”

¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Reading Luke 4:16-21

¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Message Recovery of Sight for the Blind

The last couple of weeks we have spent time digging into what Jesus may have meant when he talked about good news to the poor and release to the captives. In both cases it seems clear that there are two aspects to what is being said. Good News to the poor requires both a relationship with Jesus and restoration of physical life, in many ways a reflection of James’ reminder that faith without doing is dead. In a similar way we saw that release to the captives has both a physical measure and a spiritual measure.

Today we are going to see where recovery of sight to the blind might lead us.

We pray. God who sees us, who knows when we sit and when we rise, for whom the darkest night is as bright as a sunny day we bring ourselves before you. We ask you to illuminate our thoughts today and help us to understand a little more of who you are to us and who we are to you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Let’s begin with the easy bit.

Recovery. Simply from the letters RE we know that we are getting something that has existed in the past. Recovery is not the creation of something new, it is the getting back of something that we had before. A recovering alcoholic was not always an alcoholic and with plenty of love and support will hope that they can get back to a state at least similar to what they had before the alcohol took over. It is the same with someone recovering from surgery – their goal is to get back to a condition they had before the surgery became necessary.

I know a lot of you take great joy in watching those TV shows where old items are restored to their former glory. The Repair Shop is a great example. The whole aim of the show is to take items in fairly ill health and bring them back to something like they were before.

So, when we see the words, recovery of sight for the blind, it is not a case of taking someone who could never see and giving them something they had not experienced. It is taking someone who could once see and can no longer see then restoring what they have lost. Food for thought as we go.

Which brings us to, ‘sight for the blind.’ Jesus accused the Pharisees of being blind on more than one occasion. Once, when they claimed they could see, Jesus turned it on them and showed that in claiming to see they were

responsible for their actions. I think this is significant because in seeing we become responsible. If I can see that you need help and fail to help, I am responsible. If I see that I have made a mistake and fail to correct that mistake, I am responsible. In other words, there is more to recovery of sight than simply being able to see. That ability to see brings with it a particular responsibility. I want to come back to that in a moment.

First, what is sight and who are the blind? As with Good News and Release for the Captives, there are physical and spiritual parts to this. Unlike the first two the physical and spiritual aren't quite as closely aligned, at least not as far as I can see. The physical loss of sight for anyone is huge, as I am sure a number of you will readily attest. The miracle of cataract removal is just one example of the restoration of physical sight. When Jesus suggests to a person who is physically blind that they might be able to see again it is no wonder they get a little excited. Particularly when in that society there was no Blind Foundation, no sickness benefit, no support of any kind outside of family and friends. Recovery of physical sight was of immediate financial and social benefit. It mattered. A lot! And still does today.

Unfortunately, there is a much larger group of people who can see perfectly well in a physical sense while being utterly blind in the spiritual sense. One of the saddest things about this is that they are reasonable equally distributed through the church and secular society. There are just as many spiritually blind in the church as out of it, as a proportion. Two things that might surprise you there. One, that people in the church are spiritually blind. Two, that people not in the church might have spiritual sight.

Let's think about those in reverse order. People not in the church can see in the spiritual and be aware of what God is doing even when they don't necessarily acknowledge what it really is. On a number of occasions I have spoken with people who are actively hostile to the church because they can see the spiritual damage the church is doing to their community. They would never name it in those terms, but what they have said has been accurate and insightful. AND, they know what they see and they hold themselves accountable for what they do with it. It is to the shame of the church that it fails to respond suitably to criticisms from these people.

You would think that anyone in the church would be able to see spiritually. For many reasons that is not the case. Some are new to faith and have not yet learned what they are looking at. They are not who we are talking about here.

Some refuse to see spiritually, perhaps through social or historical pressure or other reasons we don't know. Some have seen and have stopped looking, perhaps it has been too hard, or they have fallen out of the habit. Sadly, those who have chosen not to see are all too common in the church. A couple of weeks ago, God challenged me to look and see what was happening spiritually in church that Sunday. I didn't know what I was looking for and it took me a while to understand what I saw. But to my delight I saw a spirit of joy among the people. I still don't understand why God wanted me to see that, although I have my suspicions. My point is that there are spiritual things going on around us all the time, whether we choose to acknowledge them or not, whether we choose to see them or not.

When Jesus read the words, I have come to proclaim...recovery of sight for the blind, he was talking physically AND spiritually. Can you see the theme coming through?

Good News	Physical	Spiritual
Release to the Captives	Physical	Spiritual
Recovery of Sight	Physical	Spiritual

More than any time in the last few decades we need to be praying that God would allow us to recover our sight, our spiritual sight. I know that some of you have never lost it. And some have lost sight of what God is doing. The pressures of life have meant you have set it down and never taken it up again. Pray that God will restore your sight into what is going on spiritually. For way too long we have been the blind leading the blind. It doesn't matter how old you are, a centurion with spiritual sight can lead those without. An eighty-year-old with failing physical vision but healthy spiritual sight can lead those without.

Now, more than ever, we need the people and kings of Nineveh, who recover their spiritual sight and kneel in repentance and salvation. In their words, 'Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.' We know that God genuinely wanted them to repent and come into relationship with him. Spiritual sight meant that is exactly what happened. May our spiritual sight be recovered so that we do not perish.

We Pray

You said, 'Let there be light, and there was.' Before that, there was nothing to see. And suddenly sight came. We ask that you spread out your light in our lives so that we can see what you see. We long for you to move among us in power and yet we struggle to open our eyes to see what you are doing. Gift us renewed, recovered sight, we pray, so that we can see your glory as the king of Nineveh saw, and see your salvation as the people of Nineveh saw. In Jesus name. Amen.

Let the weak say, "I am strong."

Reuben Morgan

Let the weak say, "I am strong"

Let the poor say, "I am rich"

Let the blind say, "I can see"

It's what the Lord has done in me

Hosanna, hosanna

To the Lamb that was slain

Hosanna, hosanna

Jesus died and rose again

Into the river I will wade

There my sins are washed away

From the heavens' mercy streams

Of the Saviour's love for me

I will rise from waters deep

Into the saving arms of God

I will sing salvation songs

Jesus Christ has set me free

Offering

God of power and might: Through the ages, you have reminded us through prophets and apostles that we are called to battle – not with one another, but against the powers of darkness and evil. It is this battle that sends children to bed with empty bellies, while others have so much food it damages their health. It is the battle that imprisons those whose only crime is poverty, while those with more than they could ever spend lose sleep scheming how to get more. As we make our gifts to you this day, may we remember which side we're on. In the precious, loving name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

Haiti: With nearly 2000 dead from the earthquake and rising and conditions made worse by a tropical storm we bring our prayers for the people of Haiti. Desperately low on supplies and with few skilled medical people.

Afghanistan: The Taliban appear to be looking to create some kind of peaceful transfer of power. Deep concern remains for those Afghans who worked with the West, and for all the women and children who face desperate circumstances under the patriarchal regime.

Covid: For the millions around the world suffering from this disease. For the medical staff struggling to maintain a sense of reality in the midst of so much suffering. Here in New Zealand as people work hard to reduce the impact of the community cases in the country.

Leaders: For leaders of nations in the constant jostling for power and influence. For the way they care for those for whom they are responsible. For the leaders of churches struggling to hear what God is doing in the midst of the chaos.

The poor: The neglected, the lost, the hungry, the powerless. That they would find hope, freedom and sight through Jesus and through the help of those who call Jesus their own.

Ourselves: Those we love, our friends and families and pets. The travellers and the sick. Our own hopes and fears and dreams.

All these we bring in the name of Jesus who taught us how to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy 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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

Do Something Beautiful

Graham Kendrick

We are a shining light
City on a hill that can't be hidden
A shining light
And this shining light
Is the life of Jesus in us, Oh what a light
The fire of his Spirit burns
With justice, joy and peace
And works through our hands and feet

Go do something beautiful
In the name of Jesus
Do something beautiful
Go do something Jesus would
Do something beautiful
Do something beautiful

We are the salt of the earth
Here to purify and flavour, salt of the earth
Sent through all the earth
To love God and love our neighbour, salt of the Earth
As freely as we received
So freely we must give
And we are his hands and feet

Let your light so shine
Before the world
That all may see
The good you do
And give their praise
To God our Father

Benediction and Grace

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.