

Prayer

Give us the Spirit of Praise, Father Almighty! May we thank You for our lives and the world in which we live; may we praise You for the saving work of Jesus Christ; may we thank You for each other and the love we find in fellowship, and may we praise You for Your eternal glory and power, revealed to us through Your Word. May the Spirit of Praise never leave us! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

- *Pray for your church and the people you know within it*
- *Pray for churches in your area, and Christians you do not know*
- *Pray for your denomination or church group, and all it stands for*
- *Pray for other denominations and churches, and all they stand for*
- *Pray that God's people will be faithful in the service of the Gospel*
- *Pray that those on the edge of the church will encounter Christ*

Meditation

Give time to things which need your attention, wholeheartedly:
Receive help from others when you need it, graciously:

Give love to those who mean so much to you, passionately:
Receive love from those who wish to give it to you, affectionately.

Give money away to those who need it most, unconditionally:
Receive money whether it is a gift or it is pay, appreciatively.

Give your effort to whatever needs to be done, without reserve:
Receive the benefits of the work of others for you, unreservedly.

Give yourself to the glorious work of the Gospel, unstintingly:
Receive the blessings of the Kingdom of God, enthusiastically.

Giving is a joy and a great privilege of life, without question,
For receiving is the great honour of being loved, undeservedly

And all this reflects a relationship with our Lord, magnificently!

Bible Study - Romans 6:1-5

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Reflections

As we would expect from Paul in his letter to the Romans, this passage is profoundly challenging, but no more so than at its end where he says, '*if we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection*' (Romans 6:5). To some extent, Paul makes this remark to encourage newly baptised Christians to live a new life of resurrection power (see verse 4). Most of the time, Christians are occupied living their lives in this world, so it is important to know about the power of God available now to those who are baptised, and to appreciate how the resurrection can change life in the present. However, there is more to what Paul said than this.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ broke down the boundaries between earth and heaven, between this life and the next, between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God's grace. Moreover, this has radical implication for the present day, because one of the most important things about the resurrection is that it gives us a real hope of being with God in heaven after we die. Of course, this is no automatic right, as if all created souls naturally fly into the 'spirit' world at death. Such an idea is the stuff of common hope but not of true spiritual faith in God. The only bridge between earth and heaven is Christ, so we cross it by faith in Him alone. Why should we imagine that there is another way?

By far the majority of sermons I have heard in recent times are on the general theme of 'how to live the Christian life', encompassing everything from right belief, to right practice, and right worship. Occasionally, however, a preacher might find the courage to preach not about people's present and immediate future, but about their eternal future. This is important, because many good Christians have not heard much, if anything, about how and why they may enter eternity and be with God. Their problems surface when a loved one dies, and they find it hard if the minister taking the funeral service feels it inappropriate to assume that the person has gone to heaven because he or she has never professed faith. Surely, people think, the soul must now be somewhere, and if God is good, He must surely be kind to that person, even in death?

How far we wander from the Gospel when faced by life's crises! We cannot put ourselves in the place of God or understand how He will judge all things, but we can respond with faith to the call of Jesus to believe in Him and know for sure that we have found God as our own Father, who will never deny us. This is the only way to heaven revealed to us, and it is through Jesus Christ. As Paul says elsewhere, the resurrection life we live now is but the beginning of the full resurrection life to come (see 1 Cor 13:8-13). By faith, we can fully expect to move from this life to the next in Christ, and look forward to being with our Creator forever!

How sad it is that the matter of what happens to people after death is a matter of debate. The Bible sets out a clear pathway that leads all who believe in Jesus into the presence of the Father. Whatever we believe about how Christ might come again or what part of our 'self' survives death, Scripture is confident that through Jesus, we will be with God. Paul speaks about the Christian being given a new '*resurrection body*' by Christ after death (1 Cor 15:42) to replace the mortal frame. What an assurance!

How sad it is that people do not like to talk about death or think of it as utterly unknowable. I have met preachers who have been chastised for preaching about it, and ordinary Christians who were ridiculed for bringing it up at house-group! Yet part of the glory of the Gospel is the message that people are not made for this life alone; they are made eternally and for a reason. We invite people to become Christians to live not just for this life but for eternity as well!

I am not sure why preachers do not often speak today about eternity, or heaven, or the everlasting life of resurrection. In the midst of a mad world in which most of us are constantly trying to make sense of what is happening all around us, it surely makes sense to preach the Biblical truth about the resurrection life of heaven as well as earth. I was once warned that it was worthless to talk about heaven, and appear to be 'so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good'. Frankly, this is just an insult dressed up as a catch-phrase, and a denial of much that is real about life and the Bible. In my experience, those who are most confident about their eternal future are those who are able to rise above the stresses of modern life. With the assurance of this resurrection, the Christian can place the troubles and nervous tension of daily living in an eternal context and find God's perspective. Surely this is one of faith's greatest gifts!

Live in the knowledge that as Christ's loved men and women of faith, we do not have to worry about how things will turn out. If we are committed to Him, then He has His eternal hand on our present and our future. We can be confident that God will be utterly and acceptably just with all things; we know that we have nothing to fear in His presence. If we are afraid, then we need to go back to our Bibles and check out what Jesus says about those who have faith in Him (for example, in John 14). Trust Him, and live in peace, even in this troubled world.

God bless you

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