

Newsletter 26th September 2021

Sunday's Readings: Revelation 19 verses 7 -10

Trevor Barnett will be bringing us the Word this week

Prayers of the people

- Pray for those in our country who are coping with lockdowns and those near the areas of covid19 outbreaks and with the difficult circumstances and stress this causes.
- Please pray for the people of Afghanistan as they deal with fear, and persecution and the unfolding circumstances of lack of food and services.
- Please continue to pray for Murray Burdett, John Ruck, Gordon Williams, Grant Inverarity as they cope health issues and pray for improved health and recovery.
- Please pray for and encourage those who may be unwell or stressed in our congregation.

Notices

Congregational Meeting 10th October:

To proceed in filling the vacancy created by the pending retirement of Andrew early in 2022 we are required to appoint a Joint Nominating Committee. The JNC is made up by at least two persons appointed by Presbytery, one of these as Chairperson, and 2 to 6 persons appointed by the Congregation.

The regulations regarding the appointment of a Minister of the Word contain a provision " that the Congregation delegates authority to the Church Council to appoint its members to the JNC."

The Church Council is seeking an endorsement to act on behalf of the Congregation and in formalizing this proposal a meeting of the Congregation will be held on Sunday 10th October following the morning service.

If you have any questions prior to the meeting please contact members of the Church Council, Congregation Secretary Carol Lawrie or Bill Cobbledick Chairman of the Congregation.

Church Gardeners Required: Jill and Eugene are " retiring " as of the 1st November – Is gardening a passion for you? See Jill and Eugene

K4C News update: This term we have had fun learning the 10 Commandments and teachers have prepared great lessons from the gospels of Mark and Luke. The last lesson will be on 26th Sept. and recommence on the 24th of October. We look forward to preparing another exciting program leading up to Christmas. K4C will be taking part and leading the Christmas presentation Service on December 5th. Please keep this day free and tell your family and friends.

End of Month Luncheon: Lunch at "Billy Mac's" on 26th at 12 noon please indicate if you would like to come for bookings. Join in for fellowship and a nice meal.

Hearing Aide: A hearing was found in the church on Sunday 19th, if you have lost one or may know who it belongs to contact the office.

Tithe a tin Pray a Packet: the support that the congregation gives this worthy project is very much appreciated by those who are in need during these difficult times. Thank you very much

Pastoral Care Fundraiser Early Notice BBQ to be held at a date to be advised

Church Service: Due to Covid 19 the guidelines for Sunday are as follows.

- Masks must be worn
- 1/2m² distancing applies (**152** persons in the church)
- Singing allowed with masks on.
- Morning Tea under covid 19 guidelines
- Sunday school and Youth Alpha is on!

Tarooki: Please join us to celebrate 61 years of camping in Robe. Onsite at 55 Main St. Robe on Sunday November 14th, 2021, at 10.30am for a Thanksgiving Service followed by a catered lunch. RSVP to tarooki@uvsa.org.au or 0429157270 by November 1st.

Midweek Bible reading: Acts 4:23-30

The believers pray

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up

and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one”

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’

Why do we pray? The author Ambrose Bierce defined prayer as “To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled on behalf of a single petitioner, confessedly unworthy”.

Is that how we should think about prayer? The main problem here is that Bierce is looking at prayer from a human point of view. What we should be asking is what does God say about prayer. How does God say prayer works?

And to know that, we have to see how things work in Scripture. As DA Carson points out the Bible teaches and demonstrates that two quite separate propositions are true:

1. God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in Scripture to reduce human responsibility.
2. Human beings are responsible creatures – that is, they choose, they believe, they disobey, they respond, and these can be moral choices; but human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God’s sovereignty or to make God absolutely dependent on us and our decisions.ⁱ

A good example of this is the reading above from Acts 4.

The disciples pray that even though Herod and Pilot are threatening the believers, they pray that God would empower his disciples to speak out and that God would confirm their words by miracles through the name of Jesus. They first point out that both Herod and Pilot are morally responsible for their actions that condemned Jesus to death, but that God had previously determined that this was exactly what would happen. God’s aim in this was to bring ultimate good – the salvation of believers through the forgiveness of sin.

And actually, to disbelieve this is to stop being a Christian. So, both propositions (God’s sovereignty and our responsibility) function as truths in Scripture.

Our problem is seeing how both of these things can be true.

DA Carson writes: “Many Christians today think that if human beings are to be thought of as morally responsible creatures, they must be free to choose, to believe, to disobey, and so forth. But what does “freedom” mean? Sometimes without thinking about it, we assume that such freedom must entail the power to break any constraint, so that there is no necessity in the choice we make. If we are constrained to choose a certain option, if what we decide is in fact utterly inevitable, then how can it be ours? And if not truly ours, how can we be held morally accountable?”ⁱⁱ

The way out of this bind is to go back to Scripture. Scripture forces us to see that whatever happens, God remains in charge and that we are responsible for what we do, for what we choose, and indeed for what we pray. That’s the way things work in Scripture.

We are in the end forced to either accept God is God and accept that things work out according to God’s will, and to also accept that we are morally responsible for our actions, or we must stop believing in either human moral responsibility, or God’s superintendence.

A good example, in which both ideas are joined in one sentence is Philippians 2:11-13 “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose”.

So, how does all this relate to prayer? How is our prayer meaningful if God has already determined what will happen?

The simple answer may be that our prayer, an action that we make a moral decision about, is itself part of God’s superintendence and part of God’s plan to bring about his will. When we pray, “in the Spirit”, in “the will of God”, God gives us the dignity of participating in his superintendence of his creation

And our prayers have a real, practical effect. Again, an example as how it works in scripture is when Moses prayed for the Israelites after their idolatry concerning the golden calf. God is furious. He says to Moses: “I have seen these people...and they are a stiff-necked people.¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.” (Ex 32:9-11)

But Moses will not leave God alone. He prays that God will turn from his fierce anger and relent, and not bring disaster on his people, pointing out that they are his people, and that God has promised to covenant with them. And we read in Ex 32:14 that “the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened”.

The Scripture says that God “relented” – that is God changed his mind. Moses prayed and the outcome was changed. How could this be true? Is God inconsistent? I would argue that God is not inconsistent but simply honouring the covenant and the promise that he made to Abraham while at the same time pointing out to Moses (and the Israelites) just how much this mercy is costing God. God, as a perfectly righteous God demands that justice be done, but absorbs this hurt within himself. Ultimately God ends up paying for sin so that the slate is wiped clean for us all – and that’s what Easter will be all about.

Now, just how this all works is still a mystery. Prayer is a mystery too. Do the dimensions of space-time that are outside our 4 dimensions of space and time provide a rational way in which God’s sovereignty and our responsibility can be completely true at the same time? I don’t know.

But what we can know for sure is that Jesus himself prayed and encouraged us to pray about everything that is on our hearts, and he promises us that God answers such pray.

That’s the way prayer works in Scripture and that’s how it works in our lives.

Andrew

ⁱ DA Carson, A Call to Spiritual Reformation, Baker Academic 1992, p148

ⁱⁱ Ibid, p157