**Sermon 3**

**Prayer: Inward. Experiencing his grace – Sunday 22 April**

**By Anna Burden**

**Intro**

Today we’re continuing our series on prayer which will lead us to the 10 days of prayer from 10-20 May as part of the global initiative ‘thy kingdom come’

Last week we looked at upward prayer - praising God, this week inward prayer – experiencing his grace, and next week will be outwards prayer - asking for help.

First of all I want to clarify what I’m going to talk about under this title Inward prayer: experiencing his grace.

I going to focus on our personal relationship with God and the grace that makes that possible and his grace to transform us from inside out.

This restored personal relationship with God is what makes it possible for us to prayer and talk to God without the barrier of sin. Inward prayer is you and God – our ‘sonship’ and being able to say ‘Abba Father’ – Jesus sitting at the father’s right hand interceding for us (Romans 8).

**Summary**

1. Our position before God
2. Results of grace
3. Sharing God’s grace
4. **Our position before God**

Two truths about God

* Holy, punishes sin
* Forgiving

Both the Old Testament passages Psalm 130 and Micah 7 speak about the reverence and fear of God and then the amazement that we can stand before him and he has compassion on us.

***Psalm 130:3-4***

*If you kept a record of our sins,
    who could escape being condemned?
4 But you forgive us,
    so that we should stand in awe of you.*

***Micah 7:18***

*Who is a God like you,
    who pardons sin and forgives the transgression
    of the remnant of his inheritance?
You do not stay angry forever
    but delight to show mercy.*

Unless we first know the awe of who God is, we are not able to grasp how amazing it is that he forgives us.

God is creator of the universe.

Our every breath is in his hands.

He is holy.

He is righteous.

He is above all and demands praise (even the stones will cry out).

He is greater than our words can express!

C.S. Lewis’ book, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, shows an image of what God is like through Aslan. Here is a quote from the book when Mr and Mrs Beaver tell the children about Aslan:

*“Is he a man?” asked Lucy.*

*“Aslan a man!” said Mr Beaver sternly. Certainly not. I tell you he is King of the wood and the son of the great emperor-beyond-the-sea. Don’t you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion – the Lion, the great lion.”*

*“ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”*

*“That you will, dearie, and no mistake” said Mrs Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”*

*“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.*

*“Safe?” said Mr Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”*

Yet he is also a God of community, of relationship, of compassion and of love for all he has made.

God created humans to have an intimate relationship with him – if we think back to our series on Genesis and in the second chapter heard about what God made us for, then in Genesis 3 how sin wrecked that relationship?

But God had a plan to restore this broken relationship.

*Quote: Rick Warren*

*You were made to have a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that God is dying to have with you. In fact, his son did die so you could have it. Nothing is ever going to compensate for that — no person, no experience, no drug, no success, no thing, no possession. Nothing is going to fill that aching hole in your heart that God created for himself. He wants you to know him.*

As we think of our position before God and God’s character, the Old Testament struggles to resolve how these two characteristics of God can be both be true - how can God both punish sin and forgive sin. How can God maintain holiness and reach out to sinners.

The New Testament shows Jesus as the answer.

1. **Results of grace – the gospel/good news**

We know that God gave Jesus to be the answer to restore the broken relationship. To reconcile his love for us with his perfect holiness. This is the good news – the gospel!

To understand the gospel and live in the blessing of his grace we need to know two things:

* **The cost**
* **The freedom**

Firstly, it cost Jesus dearly to give himself for us.

* Creator God worthy of all praise, was insulted and mocked,
* Holy God, was pierced by sin,
* God of community, was separated.

If we think forgiveness was easy, or that sin doesn’t offend God then there is no real change of heart.

Secondly, the gospel brings total freedom – Jesus paid once and for all for every human who accepts his gift of forgiveness and new life. *There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8v1&2).*

If we don’t believe the gospel brings total freedom then we will continue in guilt, shame and striving in our own strength. But if we know we are loved and accepted in spite of our sins, it is far easier to acknowledge our flaws and we have a deep security to admit when we’re wrong. *‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’*

As well as costing God dearly to bring forgiveness and a new relationship, we need to count the cost and consider what it means for us (Luke 14)

I’m sure you heard the terrible stories of the Nigerian girls kidnapped by Boko Haran? 4 years ago 300 girls were kidnapped from their school in Chibok, and then more recently in February 107 girls from their school in Dapchi.

A couple of weeks ago we heard that the Dapachi girls had been released following negotiation talks between the Nigerian government and Boko Haran. But one girl, Leah, is believed to be the only schoolgirl from that group still in captivity. When interviewed straight after the release her father, [Nathan, said](https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/22/africa/nigeria-missing-girls-father/index.html) his family has been thrown into despair. The freed girls told him his daughter was left behind because she refused to renounce her Christian faith. The aggrieved father urged the Nigerian government and international community to mount pressure on the terror group to release his daughter.

*"I am just praying right now that they release her. My daughter is alive, but they wouldn't release her because she is a Christian. They told her they would release her if she converted, but she said she will never become a Muslim. I am very sad, but I am also overjoyed because my daughter did not denounce Christ.”*

What is the cost for you?

Are you prepared to give all of yourself to the one who has given all for us?

Do you know the joy of freedom – trusting on God’s grace and not your own works or goodness?

Joyce Meyer:

*“When you think of religion, what comes to your mind—a set of rules, regulations and obligations or a deep, intimate relationship with God?*

*I like to consider myself someone who has a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. I believe He died so we could have a living, vital relationship with God, not just a bunch of rules and regulations we're forced to follow.
Yes, there are certain guidelines God wants us to follow, but His purpose in giving them is to protect us from the consequences of sin.
When we have a real relationship with God through Christ, life gets exciting because He stirs up a passion inside us to love people—and we don't have to struggle to do the things He calls us to do. It just happens naturally.”*

Prayer is a key part of a relationship between us personally and God. Through Jesus this relationship has been restored. God’s grace brings personal salvation - once and for all

Tim Keller in his book ‘Prayer: Awe and Intimacy with God’, talks about our inward prayer and response to God’s grace being confession and forsaking our sins.

To be inwardly grieved and appalled so sin loses its hold over us.

To recognise that as well as the danger and consequences of sin, sin also grieves and dishonours God.

God-centred confession and forsaking of sin is a powerful instrument of change

We can do this by considering:

* Intimacy we have with the Father and Holy Spirit
* Costly sacrifice of Christ
* Glory and transcendent majesty of God
* Patience of the Lord towards us
* Jesus’ unconditional love and commitment to us
* Our adoption into God’s family
* Holy Spirit living in us

The fear of consequences of sin may change behaviours externally or temporarily, but a desire to honour and please God changes us from the inside out.

The gospel is *also,* ongoing. The gospel is more than a moment of personal salvation, it changes our whole outlook and life.

This and a few other slides are from ‘Visual Theology’, which put some of the biblical truths into diagrams.

An inward experience of God’s grace is a true life change: a spiritual awakening and results in new behaviours.

Grace transforms us to fulfil our God-given potential and live in obedience to God:

* To love God
* To love one another – here in the church and in our community and those in need; and
* To be filled with the spirit.

This reminds me of one of the themes in the ‘bible in one year’ audio recordings that I listened to last week – about trusting and obeying. As we experience God’s grace and forgiveness knowing who he is and what he’s done, it leads us to trust him and obey him. This transforms our lives and impacts others.

The passage was Deuteronomy 9 & 10 and Nicky Gumball commented:

*God’s blessing is pure grace: ‘It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity’ (9:5). Moses reminds the people of God of all the things that went wrong for them in the past. He tells them that the reason was, ‘You did not trust him or obey him’ (v.23).*

*Moses urges them that now they are to trust and obey God. ‘What does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?’ (10:12–13).*

*When we are tempted to disobey God, it is because we do not trust that he has our best interests at heart. We like to think that we know better than God as to what is best for us. However, the reality is that all God’s commands are ‘for your own good’. God loves you, cares for you and knows you, and that is why he wants you to obey him.*

*The truth is that you can trust God, even when you find his commands difficult or restrictive. The omnipotent God, to whom belong ‘the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it’ has ‘set his affection’ on you ‘and loved’ you, ‘and he chose you’ (vv.14–15).*

*This faith is inward, not just outward: ‘Circumcise your hearts’ (v.16). Yet, it is a faith that leads to action. You are called to follow God’s example and defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and love the alien, giving them food and clothing (v.18). There is to be no racial discrimination. We should have a special love and service for the poor and the marginalised.*

*God promises that if you trust and obey him you will see growth and multiplication. ‘Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky’ (v.22).*

1. **Share this amazing grace with yourself and others**

My final point is we need to share God’s grace and goodness!

Firstly, preach to ourselves: continually remind ourselves of God’s grace and goodness.

This is something David did, for example in Psalm 139 (23&24), he says:

*“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

Reflect on the Ten Commandments and meditate on the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5

Secondly, preach the gospel to others – share his good news and grace. In words and in actions.

An inward prayer encounter with God transforms us and outworks in transforming others – both sharing the good news of salvation, and practically being good news in our actions and our love for our neighbours.

You may have been waiting to see how I would slip in Christian Aid into my sermon today….

In three weeks’ time as we start the 10 days of prayer with ‘Thy kingdom come’ it is the beginning of Christian Aid Week. Christian Aid Week is a wonderful opportunity for the church to let the community know it is here and to show they are welcome to be part and hear the good news. At the same time Christian Aid Week is an opportunity to give to those who are most in need – to practically love our global neighbours in need. All denominations and hundreds of thousands of Christians join together in what Dr Rowan Williams has called 'the largest single act of Christian witness in the UK'. Do ask me or look online to find out how you can get involved.

**Summary**

1. Our position before God
2. Results of grace
3. Sharing God’s grace

I will close with the Bible in one Year prayer from the day I mentioned a few moments ago.

*Lord, thank you that you have set your affection on me, loved me and chosen me. Help me today to fear you, to walk in all your ways, to love you and to serve you with all my heart and all my soul. Help me to defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow and to love those in need. I pray that you would make your church as numerous as the stars in the sky.*