

WORSHIP for January 31, 2021

Prelude played by Brent Miller, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

Streaming CCLI 20373701; by Joseph M Scriven, 1855, Public Domain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9dTAR9KJ0w>

Call to Worship: Psalm 51:15-17 *Responsively*

Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it,

you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;

a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

Opening Hymn: **“He’s Got the Whole World”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDBJNQiugnM>

Prayer of Confession: Ephesians 2:1-3 *Responsively*

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

(Pause now for a time of silent confession.)

Assurance of Forgiveness: Ephesians 2:4-10 *Responsively*

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression – it is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

In order that in the coming he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this is not from yourselves.

It is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

“The Gloria Patri”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgcYD_m4OhU

Hymn of Preparation: “In Christ There Is No East Nor West”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yaYRwU1z_E

“Scripture cannot be set aside... What does Scripture say?” John 10:35 & Romans 4:3.

Prayer for Illumination: *Unison*

Lord, through your Spirit enable us to consider your Word, and to enact it in our lives to bring you glory and praise. Amen.

Scripture Readings: Ephesians 6:5-9 and Philemon

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+6%3A5-9&version=NIV>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossian+3%3A22-4%3A1&version=NIV>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon&version=NIV>

SERMON: “As a Dear Brother” by *The Reverend Dr. Janet Hufford*

Watch sermon on: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAdy2hvW6PL93B6hbgswTxf93Evs575yd>

Ephesians is about being in God’s family. Today’s verses from Ephesians refer to servants in God’s household, as do similar verses from Colossians and Paul’s letter to Philemon

The shortest of Paul’s letters that he writes from prison is to Philemon, the owner of the slave Onesimus. Philemon lives in Colossae. Paul writes these letters along with Timothy, just as he wrote his letter to the church in Philippi, which was established during his 2nd missionary journey, when he and Silas had Timothy join them. We heard sermons from each chapter of Philippians during the 4 weeks of Advent.

During these sermons we also referred to Acts 16, where in Philippi Paul set a slave girl free from an evil spirit. The girl was abused by her owners who forced her to practice divination thru the evil spirit. This account is an example of Paul’s compassion for those held captive in slavery. Paul’s letter to Philemon is another example.

Interestingly Paul writes Philemon during his own imprisonment in Rome. Like the slave woman from Acts 16 Paul is held in captivity. But the letter to Philemon is written since he is the owner of a young slave named Onesimus. Onesimus, however, had escaped from his owner Philemon.

But now both Philemon and Onesimus through Paul have been converted to Christ. Furthermore, Onesimus helped Paul during his imprisonment. In doing so, their relationship became so close that Paul refers to Onesimus as his son, just as he does to other young men to whom he refers in his letter, like Luke who helps him to write and Mark a fellow worker who also sends greetings.

Now Paul is sending Onesimus back to his owner, since as a Christian the young man is to respect those in authority. And since he did not do so, he needs make amends.

But Paul who calls himself a brother offers to compensate Philemon for any wrong done by Onesimus, although he reminds his brother that he owes Paul his very self. With that he asks a favor. He asks Philemon to receive Onesimus not as a slave, but as a brother. After all, brotherly love is the root of Philemon’s name!

Further, Paul’s request reminds us of the words of Jesus Christ. Early in his ministry in Mark 3:35 Jesus says that all who do the will of God are his brothers and sisters. At his resurrection John 20:17 Jesus tells Mary to go and tell his brothers. Recall that the letter to

Ephesus begins with Paul identifying all believers as adopted sons of God. In addition, in John 15:15 at the Last Supper, Jesus says to his disciples that he no longer calls them servants, but friends. At his arrest in Matthew 26:50 Jesus calls Judas who betrayed him "friend." So if Jesus, who is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings considers us brothers or sisters and friends, should we not consider all other believers the same?

After all, Jesus is no distinguisher of classes. He healed the servant of a centurion. Further, Jesus is not a promoter of privilege. When Jesus noticed how guests picked places of honor at the table he told this parable recorded in Luke 14:7-13.

Now the passages from Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon may not feel relevant today, but remember that Ephesians is about family. In the Old Testament and at the time of Jesus and Paul servants were commonly a part of the family or household. So in Jewish households in the Old Testament all males were circumcised, including servants. In Philippi when Lydia and in Joppa when Cornelius were baptized, so were their entire households, including children and servants.

Further, in our country's history slaves and servants were a part of households, too. Since current civil unrest in America exists due to the presence of slavery in our history, the passages from Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon are very relevant today. Not to promote slavery, but to promote brotherhood among believers, since no one is above another. All are equal. In Christ all are free. Galatians 3:28 states, "'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

However, for those whose families were enslaved, there is a need for much healing before all fellow believers might be considered trusted brothers. I have (*Pastor Janet had*) recently watched the DVD: "Billy Graham: An Extraordinary Journey, One Ordinary Man, One Extraordinary God." In it Billy stated, "Some people are predicting the possibility of a race war. It's not a problem in Alabama alone. It's a world problem, wherever you have 2 races living. Is there an answer? Yes, there is an answer. The answer is in the cross of Jesus Christ. And there is a possibility of spiritual brotherhood in Christ alone." Billy Graham worked alongside his brother, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for equality among races. After Dr. King's assassination, Billy preached, "There is no excuse ever for hatred. There is no excuse ever for bigotry and intolerance and prejudice. We are to love as God loves us." Dr. King's daughter, Bernice, said of Billy, "I think both Dr. Graham and my father were trying to make the world a better place." Associate Evangelist Howard Jones said, "Billy and Martin were friends, and a lot of whites damned Billy for that." Later in the video Billy presented, "We demanded integration almost from the beginning of our meetings in the south. Now today it's almost impossible for the present generation to understand what things were in those days and what it took to be that way, how many threatening letters we got and how many threats there were against my family as a result of the stand that we took at that time." At crusades in the south in the early 1950s, Billy discovered ropes segregating people. He said, "Blacks were supposed to sit in back and the white would sit in front. I was appalled at it and decided that I had speak out on it and had to do something about it. I said no more of this." Billy took the ropes down himself. In a 1957 article, Billy wrote, "It is not sufficient to urge people to love their neighbor, unless we lead them also to the capacity to love. Christ gives men this capacity." Bernice, Dr. King's

daughter said of Dr. Graham, “His approach was more of trying to get people into the relationship with Christ that would transform their minds and the way in which they lived. So they would see people differently. And, thus, treat people differently.” In NY Billy proclaimed, “There is something wrong with human nature. What is it in the nature of men that causes men to have intolerance and racial intolerance? The problem of the world tonight is sin!” Billy encouraged American presidents to take steps to end racial segregation. Billy’s concern for racial equality extended to South Africa during apartheid. He repeatedly refused invitations to visit unless the government allowed a non-segregated meeting. He preached there, “Christianity is not a white man’s religion. And don’t let anyone ever tell you that it’s white or black. Christ belongs to all people. He belongs to the whole world. His gospel is for everyone”

Although Scripture promotes brotherly relationships, too, those of us who have not had relatives who suffered slavery may not understand the depth of hurt caused through the generations. But the truth is that slavery hurts the entire human race, since Christ’s intention of reconciliation and God’s will is not yet done. John Newton, the captain of a ship that used to bring slaves from Africa, was badly haunted by his support of the awful injustice against fellow humans. He wrote the song, “Amazing Grace,” in the midst of his repentance and grace of forgiveness thru Christ. He also became a clergyman. William Wilberforce heard of Newton’s remorse, when he was a child with Newton as his pastor. Wilberforce planned to enter the clergy, too, but as a member of British parliament instead used his voice to fight for the end of the British slave trade. The stories of Newton and Wilberforce are captured in the epic movie of “Amazing Grace.”

One of the movie’s special features is “Finding Freedom: a tour of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center” in Cincinnati, OH. The feature reveals how modern day slavery is a current issue with human trafficking, which takes place throughout the world including here in Ohio. Go to endslaverynow.org to learn more. For example, 21 to 45 million people are trapped in some sort of slavery today. The United Nations defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by improper means (such as force, abduction, fraud, or coercion) for an improper purpose including forced labor or sexual exploitation. It takes on many forms today, such as bonded or child labor, domestic servitude, forced labor or marriage, and sex trafficking. To help, at least write down the number of the US National Tip Hotline, in case suspicious behavior is observed: 1-888-373-7888. I’ve put the number in my phone, for immediate easy access.

Another way to help is to assist Gracehaven, a **Christian organization in Columbus, OH, “founded to strategically help the growing number of victims of domestic minor sex trafficking.** We believe this issue must be actively addressed in order to effectively help victims, and to prevent others from falling into this world. To that end, Gracehaven employs a comprehensive approach to combating domestic minor sex trafficking.” Their website: <https://www.gracehaven.me/> further explains, “Sex trafficking is the second fastest growing criminal industry in the United States, just behind drug trafficking. Approximately half of these victims are children. Estimates show that 100,000 youth are exploited into the commercial sex industry each year in the U.S., and the average age of entry into the commercial sex industry is

14-16 years old. **In Ohio alone, more than 3,000 minors are at-risk for sex trafficking, and more than 1,000 are actually trafficked during the course of a year. Ohio is prime field for exploitation for several reasons:** 1) an extensive highway system, 2) a large number of truck stops and adult strip clubs, 3) close proximity to an international border, and 4) a high number of children living in poverty (24%).” On 12/10/2020 our session voted for FPCP to donate \$500 to Gracehaven.

Keeping all this in mind, may we do all that we can to promote right relationship in the family of God. May we work toward a world without slavery. May we pray for healing. May we be grateful for freedom in Christ, and work toward equality among all classes and races. Amen.

Hymn of Response: “Amazing Grace”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di9HZMlcVCU>

PRAYERS of Joy and Concern, followed by:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Please Continue to Give in Dedication to Our Lord and Savior, Jesus

Prayer Of Dedication: *Unison*

In view of your mercy help us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to you, O God. Amen. *Romans 12:1*

Doxology

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqpXWF15avU>

Closing Hymn: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD4B9Q6nTo0>

Benediction: Ephesian 6:23-24 *Responsively*

Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love,... in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**