

Prayer

When we are held down, dear Lord Jesus Christ, and we cannot do what we would want to do, either for ourselves, or for you; give us the grace to accept the wisdom of Your guidance of our lives. Jesus Christ, You are the reason for our living, You are the source of our hopes, and You are the goal of our desires. We praise You and we honour You; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Small businesses

Pray today for everyone you know personally, particularly from your own church fellowship, who works in a local 'small business'. Pray for them as they give their best in work, whether they hold important positions or menial ones, and ask the Lord to protect their jobs in a world which is notoriously tough on small businesses and their service to the community.

Meditation

Wonderful!

Have you known what it is like to be filled with love?
And in a moment realise that God indeed loves you?
Then immediately realised that love breaks boundaries
And opens up your life for infinite possibilities?

Have you known what it is like to receive joy from the Lord?
That sense of wondrous happiness in which your heart
And emotions leap over each other in gleeful celebration
Of the great eternal 'Yes' by which the Father greets you?

Have you known what it is like to relax in the peace of God?
It passes understanding, yes, and it feels so good!
The warmth of God's love, tinged with joy envelops you;
And somehow deep inside, you know you are secure.

Wonderful!

Bible Study - Hebrews 1:1-3a

¹ Throughout time, God has spoken to our ancestors in many different ways through the prophets, ² but in these last days He has spoken to us through the Son, whom He has made heir of all things, through whom He also made the whole world order, ³ and through whom He radiates His glory. He is the exact likeness of God's very being, and He guides all things by His powerful word.

Review

The beginning of Hebrews is the most extraordinary announcement of the nature of Jesus Christ. In contrast with nearly all of Paul's letters (which are listed in order of length from Romans to Philemon, before Hebrews), there is no introduction or greeting, and we are left wondering whether this great letter of the New Testament is a transcript of a sermon rather than a letter as such! There is much debate about who wrote this, but in our Bible study today, we will concentrate upon the text we read rather than such arguments, which have raged since the second and third centuries AD!

What must it have been like to live in the first few decades after Jesus Christ lived and died, and feel empowered by the Spirit with the message of God's truth for the whole world, revealed through the Saviour? The answer is that for many people, it must have felt something like what is said in these verses. Without going in to the theology of what is said, these words radiate

awe and wonder, as well as zeal and enthusiasm. God had done something new and vibrant in their midst and those who felt the touch of this power communicated it in many different ways. Impressively, it seems that most ordinary Christians spoke to others about the salvation they found in Christ Jesus, and the Church of God grew rapidly from the earliest times (see Acts 2:41, 4:4). Others were gifted by God to write down what they had come to know about Jesus Christ in letters and sermons, and these formed the basis for our New Testament, and also guided the discussions amongst people in the early church about who exactly Jesus Christ was. Our passage begins with the broadest sweep of history, impressively reducing God's historical plan of salvation to a couple of sentences. Up to the time of Jesus, God had revealed Himself and His purposes to His people through the 'prophets', but since the coming of God's Son (who the author eventually identifies as Jesus; Hebrews 2:9,11), we have the evidence in history of the exact 'likeness' of God (1:3), and the complete revelation of His 'glory' (1:3). There is no doubt whatsoever that the author is determined to say that Jesus Christ is God's Son, but He is also to be thought of not as a separate being to God, but something of God Himself, involved in creation (1:2) and demonstrating the very nature of God to the world. In some translations of the Bible, you will find verse 3 reads 'He is the reflection of God's glory', but this does not do justice to what the sentence means. When some object reflects something else (as a mirror reflects light) it does so without necessarily having anything else to do with what it reflects. However, when some object radiates something else (for example, when a light bulb 'radiates' light, because the light is made within it), it is because it contains that property itself. Hebrews says very clearly that the Son 'radiates' the glory of God Himself. He is what we see of God, and this is a wonderful and powerful revelation.

It was the prophets of old who could be said to have 'reflected' God's wisdom and glory, rather than radiated it! By 'prophets', the author did not just mean the prophetic authors of books in the Bible, such as Isaiah, he meant all those people from Abraham, to Moses, Miriam, Samuel, Elijah, and all the other prophets mentioned in the Old Testament who spoke and did God's Word at different times in order to guide God's people. Now, the writer to the Hebrews announces, the complete revelation is to be found in Christ Jesus, God's Son!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss the ways that the Old Testament Prophets were used by God to speak to His people. How effective were they?
2. What does it mean to us today to be called an 'heir' firstly of someone else, and secondly of God?
3. Do you think of God and Jesus as two different 'people' or as one 'person'. If you think of them as one 'person', how does this work?

Discipleship

Our Christian discipleship depends completely upon our basic beliefs, and one thing is clear about the letter to the Hebrews, which is that it challenges us very strongly about our core beliefs; about God, about Jesus, and about the intention of God to save His world. We are only beginning to get into this great New Testament letter, but already, the words used challenge us to consider what we believe about the nature of Jesus Christ. One might get the impression from many Christian churches today that we are at liberty to believe a variety of things about Jesus, but I suggest that would not have gone down well with the writer of this letter! Consider spending some time writing down who you believe Jesus to be, summarising as much as you know!

Final Prayer

All wisdom and power are Yours, Almighty and everlasting God; You govern the seasons, You rule over all kings and governments, You give gifts to Your chosen people, You reveal the secrets of the Universe, and You know what is darkness and what is light. We give you thanks and praise, Almighty and everlasting God! AMEN