

Prayer

We see You, glorious Lord God, through Jesus Christ Your Son. Hold this vision before our eyes through every event of our day, both good and bad. Then, when we are tempted to give our attention to others and when the enemy draws our gaze to worldly things, shine even more brightly we pray, and remind us of the only real source of our inspiration and life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: How we handle rejection

This will seem a very heavy subject for this coming week. Rejection is something each of us experiences in this life, but whilst some have ways of dealing with it some of the time, most of us have trouble with being rejected in one or more areas of life. Today, pray and ask the Lord to help you face these issues openly, as we explore it in the course of this week.

Meditation

It is good to be loved;

To know that there are people who care,
And whatever happens to you, for good or ill,
Someone will respond by showing practical love.

Within God's church, we have no monopoly of love;
God has lavished His gifts of love on all of His creation,
And love is found in a thousand different circumstances
As people live out their lives in a thousand different ways.

But those of us who have found faith in Jesus,
Have His command; to 'love one another' in fellowship.
So for us, it is no desirable option, but an absolute necessity;
I must put myself aside and prefer to serve the needs of others.

So the world says 'that's nice', but be careful 'look after yourself'.
However the test of Jesus' command is that if we follow it together,
We always have the help we need from others, without asking:
The greatest earthly treasure any one of us can ever know.

It is good to know God's love, through others.

Bible Study - Hebrews 1:3-4

³ After He brought about the cleansing of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to the angels as His inherited name is greater than theirs.

Review

In this extraordinary beginning to the letter to the Hebrews, the author began with an uncompromising statement of Jesus' divinity and His commission to speak and do God's work in the world (1:2). Today's brief passage is an equally powerful statement of the effective and conclusive work of Jesus (1:3) followed by the triumphant consequences of this in the heavenly places. Jesus is no angel, no created being with a mission from God, no mere mediator from one heavenly being to another, but God Himself who, having done His earthly work, has returned to His rightful place of unity with the Father (1:4)

Just as the earlier verses contained words full of meaning and power, so do these. The passage we have read today begins in verse 3, telling us in one phrase what Jesus has done to complete the saving purposes of God for the entire world; for people and also for the whole of creation. The translation 'He brought about the cleansing of sins' reads so easily and sounds so

much like a phrase from a standard church liturgy that we can be lulled into passing it by, without thinking about the full power and significance of what we are reading. The Greek words used for this phrase make it evident that what Jesus did to cleanse our sins was His own distinct and unique work. No-one else could do it, and the implication (which is found in some theological quarters today) that what Jesus did for humanity was sufficient for our salvation but not unique, thereby leaving the door open to consider the claims of other religions, is a plain contradiction of this text, let alone the rest of Scripture.

The centre piece of the system of worship God gave to the people of Israel through Moses, was the power to take away the sinful obstacles which separated God from His people through the sacrificial death of an animal (see Leviticus 1f.). Throughout the rest of Hebrews, the author explains in detail how Jesus' death on the Cross performed all the necessary sacrificial features of this removal of sin, so that God and His people could be forever reconciled, and no more sacrifices were required. However, right at the beginning of Hebrews, it is simply stated that this is what Jesus has done, of Himself, and with no other help. His death has happened, He is now alive, and His work is unrepeatably. Furthermore, what has happened is absolute and non-negotiable. Certainly it is an extraordinary mystery worthy of explanation, but without the acceptance of this spiritual truth, Christian faith is meaningless.

Jesus' work is now completed, and He has returned to the Father, and because of the magnitude of what Jesus has done, He is no angel! He is part of the very nature of God Himself, seated 'at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (1:3). Hebrews then begins to explain a theme which is not something people appear too worried about today, but from which we can learn a great deal in the coming studies, as we look at the verses which come next. The writer explains that Jesus' work is far greater than anything an angel has done or could do, and this is why He is the Son of God. Verse 4 says as much in language which leads the reader on to the first of many quotes from the Old Testament which are used in Hebrews as proof of God's truth.

All the way through Hebrews, there is a powerful sense that the whole Old Testament points to Jesus at every turn, and the writer uses texts freely to illustrate what he has to say. However, the power of the whole beginning of the letter (verses 1-4), lies in the absolute conviction of the writer that God's work to reconcile people to Himself is complete in Jesus' death and in Him alone. All sacred history points to this compelling conclusion. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews is not alone in this assessment of Jesus, for it is the heart of the whole New Testament as well as the Old. Therefore, the exclusive redeeming and saving work of Jesus Christ can never be a doctrine under dispute in the life of God's church. It is the truth upon which it rests.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read this passage in some other translations of the New Testament, and see if this helps you understand more about this great text.
2. Have you come across people in the church who are reticent about Jesus being the only 'way to the Father', in other words, unique? How do you feel about this?
3. Why might it be important to say that Jesus is greater than angels today?

Discipleship

Over the last few centuries of the life of the Christian church, people have been very reticent about Christian 'doctrine' or 'dogma'. Because of this, many people within the church have felt at liberty to explore a variety of beliefs about God and Jesus and even the nature of what is said in the Bible. Ask yourself, what Christian doctrine do you know? What Christian doctrine ought you to know? How can you get to know more Christian doctrine? See where this leads you.

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, come as a fire and come as a dove. Challenge us with the truth of Your Gospel, which alone can change the hearts of people towards truth and justice and righteousness. Bring peace to this troubled world through the love You inspire in the hearts of Your people. Come, Holy Spirit. AMEN