

Prayer

O Lord, the help of the helpless, the hope of the hopeless, the saviour of the storm-tossed, the harbour of voyagers, the physician of the sick, we pray to You. O Lord, You know each of us and our petitions, you know each house and its needs; receive us all into Your Kingdom, make us children of light, and bestow Your peace and love upon us. (*St Basil of Caesarea - c.330-79*)

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Media and the World

Offer prayers today which reflect on the way in which the world is becoming 'smaller', because the information we have about it is so readily at hand, largely through the Media. Pray for all individuals who wield great commercial power within the world and therefore affect the lives of many people. Pray for God's guidance for and judgement on such people.

Meditation

Save Your people O Lord:

Bring to light the useless, the ineffective and irrelevant within us

And replace it with purpose, power and vitality.

Uncover the rotten, the broken, and the diseased within us

And work within us to heal, to mend, and make whole again.

Reveal the prejudice, the insecurity and the intolerance within us

And change our hearts to become open, secure and free.

Expose the unease, the rebellion and the un-forgiveness within us

And enlighten us with Your salvation, assurance and eternal love.

Root out the complacency, the presumption and the conceit within us

And restore the work of Your Kingdom, Your power and Your Glory.

Save Your people, O Lord,

And may we have the courage to face what this means.

Bible Study - Hebrews 10:1-10

¹ Since the law possesses only a shadow of the good things intended and not the true form of them, it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices repeated year after year. ² If it could, would they not have stopped the sacrifices being offered, since the worshippers, once cleansed, would no longer have felt guilt for their sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins; ⁵ so when Christ came into the world, He said,

'You have not desired sacrifices and offerings,

but have prepared a body for me;

⁶ and you were not pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings.

⁷ Then I said 'Look, I have come to do Your will O God,

as it is written about me in the scroll of the book.'

⁸ First, he says, 'You neither wanted nor delighted in sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings,' (which are offered according to the law), ⁹ and he added, 'Look, I have come to do Your will.' He removes the first in order to establish the second! ¹⁰ And by this will of God we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all.

Review

This reading contains a most powerful description of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, put together by the writer of Hebrews from Psalm 40:6,7 (quoted in 10:5,6). The opening verses of our reading follow on the theme of the previous chapter (9) which is about the unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The writer has consistently argued that what Jesus did was far better than the repeated sacrifices of the old covenant, performed under the Law written in the Old Testament (principally in Exodus,

Leviticus and Deuteronomy), and in this passage, he adds a whole new dimension to this by the simple technique of placing psalm 40 on the lips of Jesus Himself.

In verse 5, the letter says; 'so when Christ came into the world, He said ...' so there can be no misunderstanding about the message; the next two verses are to be read as if Jesus Himself was speaking. By quoting these words (10:5,6,7), Jesus identified with the strong Old Testament tradition of prophets of later times (long after Moses, the Judges or even David and Solomon) which asserted that whatever sacrifices and offerings were given to God in worship, none of it had any real meaning unless the heart of the individual worshipping was genuinely seeking the Lord. Jesus, however, claimed directly that He replaced these sacrifices by the offering of the body God had given Him; '(You) have prepared a body for me' (10:5, Psalm 40:6). Jesus, quoting the Psalm, then goes on to say that the old sacrifices were not pleasing to God, He had come to 'do Your will, O God' (10:7, Psalm 40:8). As Hebrews is at pains to point out, these words from Jesus' own lips and from the Old Testament prove his point that the sacrifice of Jesus' body alone, once given, replaced every kind of Old Testament sacrifice. And just as the Old Testament sacrifices offered both worship to God and the removal of some sins, Jesus' bodily sacrifice goes further to deal with all human sin, making it possible for all our worship to be acceptable to God.

One thing is slightly awkward in this otherwise impressive argument within Hebrews, which is that if you read Psalm 40:6, it actually says 'sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear ...' ! The Psalm itself does not make sense at this point, and is rather different from what is quoted in Hebrews! There is a long story behind all this, and many theories (including some which connect the Hebrew word for 'ear' with the Greek for 'body'). However, I will suggest one way of understanding this which may help. The Hebrew expression 'open ear' is unclear, but it may well refer to the ancient practice of marking the ear of a slave who is so content with his master that he volunteers to be a servant and slave for that master, for life; a practice which is clearly documented in Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17. Now, Jesus was completely committed to the Father in the same way as such a slave, so His body was 'prepared' or marked spiritually to indicate His submission to the Father's will. The words quoted may be very different, but in ancient thought, they mean the same thing: absolute and complete service to God.

There are a number of Psalms which are often quoted in the New Testament (e.g. Psalm 110) because they were regarded as showing how the Old Testament spoke to the Church about Jesus Christ before He came; but Psalm 40 is not quoted anywhere else, despite its obvious connections with the Saviour. For this reason, most Bible commentators think that Psalm 40 is used in this passage as a literary technique to make a point, and a very good point, about Jesus. However, it is quite reasonable for us to wonder whether Jesus did indeed say these words about Himself, as He did with other scriptures (see Luke 4:18f. quoting Isaiah 61:1f.), and it is only here in Hebrews that the memory of Jesus saying these words is retained. They help to confirm our belief that Jesus knew what He was doing, and that all Scripture points towards His unique saving grace.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What do you believe to be the main point being made by Hebrews in this passage?
2. Discuss in your group what may be meant by the 'scroll of the book' mentioned in verse 7 (Psalm 40:7).
3. Read Psalm 40 and check out its connections with this passage. If you have other Bible dictionaries or commentaries, check out what they say about this passage.

Discipleship

Total commitment is an easy thing to say, but a hard act to perform! Most people who try to walk this path discover that it means different things at different points in life and is strongly related to the practicalities of living where God has called you to be. It is an attitude of the heart, like worship or love, all of which are the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. What is your experience? If you do not feel that you are 'totally committed', then talk to the Lord about this. He will show you what, if anything, is lacking.

Final Prayer

Glorious Lord, Jesus Christ; You came into this world and committed Yourself completely both to us, the people of the world who need Your salvation, and to the Father, who alone can do all things. Come into our lives this day, and give us the assurance of our sins forgiven, so that we may enter the presence of God with joy and thanksgiving. AMEN