

Prayer

We can never cease to praise You, Lord Jesus. When we feel down, our spirits yearn to return to the security of Your love; when we are distraught, our feelings are torn until they are mended by Your healing power; and when we are troubled, our minds have no rest until we place our problems into Your hands. Each of these liberating mercies are worthy of our greatest thanks and praise, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Housing

Our houses are largely made of materials that obviously come from the earth; stone, brickwork and cement; the plastics we use are products of oil, and the metals are mined from ore. Pray that people may be reminded that all we have is built upon God's provision within the earth, and pray in thanksgiving for the extraordinary range and diversity of all we have been given.

Meditation

The reward for speaking up and encouraging others,
Is friendship, and some friendships last.
But the reward for speaking evil about others,
Is personal isolation and judgement.

The reward for holding on to honesty and good faith,
Is success in the long term, despite trials.
But the reward for abandoning your integrity,
Is that in the end, no-one will trust you.

The reward for listening with care and attention,
Is that you earn the right to be heard.
But the reward for refusing to learn from others,
Is that you become the biggest bore.

The reward for perseverance through suffering,
Is the eternal victory of faith proven by fire.
But the reward for perpetual and vociferous doubt,
Is faltering indecision at the throne of grace.

As always, the choices are yours, and never go away.

Bible Study - Hebrews 2:16-18

¹⁶ For He surely did not come to help angels, but rather, the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷ And for this reason, He had to become like His brothers and sisters in every possible way so that He might become merciful, and be a faithful high priest in the service of God for the atonement of the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because He Himself was tested through suffering, He now has the power to help those who are being tested.

Review

The authority of Christ to deal with the sins of people before God and help them in times of trial and temptation is the very heart of the 'good news' of the New Testament. The way that it is explained here in Hebrews is distinct, and highlights the extraordinary way in which Jesus performed his task. He set aside all his privileges and powers in order to become human, and although he was God, He 'became like His brothers and sisters in every possible way' (2:16). This powerful phrase has become well remembered within Christian tradition because it speaks emphatically of the human connection we have with Jesus, a connection that is maintained to

this day through the spiritual and apostolic traditions of the whole Church of God (across the denominations) and through the record of His life contained within Scriptures.

But this passage says so much more. In many translations, verse 7 reads like this; 'so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest ...'. You will notice that the translation above is different. It follows the Greek text by describing Jesus as 'merciful' because He had become a human being like us, quite apart from his function as a priest. Jesus' mercy is not just an 'add-on' to his faithfulness, but an essential part of His attitude towards humanity, and I believe this is what Hebrews tells us here. Jesus' mercy was shown through the sympathy and empathy He came to feel for people during His life on earth. This is something we read about in many of the stories of Jesus, for example, when He was 'moved with compassion' at the two blind men calling out to him on the side of the Jericho road (Matt 20:30-34), or when He called out to John to look after His own mother Mary, whilst on the Cross (John 19:26f.).

The heartfelt mercy on the part of Jesus is what led Him on to be faithful to His calling as a 'High Priest' 'in the service of God (2:17). This faithfulness required our Lord to suffer and die as a sacrifice so that our sins might be forgiven, as is very obvious from the words used at the end of verse 17. Although we do not see this in English, Greek words are used in this part of the sentence which link with Jewish sacrificial worship from Old Testament times, and the principle of 'atonement' through which the sins of the people are taken away through a single sacrificial act. In the Old Testament, this act was performed annually by a priest on behalf of the people (as in Numbers 15:25f.), but the New Testament talks of Jesus' death as a unique act of atonement which can never be repeated because Jesus is the Son of God, and no other sacrifice is now necessary.

It is easy for us to talk and write about this now because what Jesus did for us is a fact of history. But we must never forget the personal cost to Him, and the glorious 'faithfulness' with which He persisted in His task, against extraordinary and evil opposition. This was obviously in the writer's mind because in the very next verse after this description of 'atonement', he talks of the sufferings of our Lord which are a means of help for all who suffer in this life. This does not mean that people's suffering does not matter because Jesus has suffered more; this is an unworthy interpretation, unworthy of our Lord and unkind to those who suffer. It means that in the midst of our suffering, which is an inescapable part of our very existence, we can be strengthened, even 'saved', because Jesus has suffered just like we have, but through faithfulness to His call, He has shown us a way through suffering to the liberation of God's deliverance and salvation.

Some may feel that all this is very 'theological'. It is not. It is just that these words from Hebrews have come alive to generations of people as they have sought to describe their experience of faith. This is a powerful, expressive and memorable passage of Hebrews.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. If Jesus came to help humans not angels, are there not angels who need help, that is, fallen angels? What do you believe God does with these?
2. Do you find this a helpful explanation of Jesus' suffering on your behalf? Are there other passages of Scripture which explain it better, in your opinion?
3. How does Jesus 'help' us (2:18). What experience do you have of this?

Discipleship

There are many great places in the Scriptures where the Gospel is summarised in powerful ways, and this is one of them. Consider whether you would benefit from studying this passage and perhaps memorising it. It does contain subtleties which we pick up on if we spend time with it. We will find more within God's Word if we allow it occupy our minds in a wholesome way such as this.

Final Prayer

Fill us with the joy of Your presence O Lord Jesus Christ! Clean our dirty souls, get rid of the rubbish of this world, and give us the delight of knowing that in You, we can be free to be creative and imaginative in the exercise of our faith. Praise God! AMEN