

## Prayer

All praise be to You, sovereign Lord of all. Your great power has been shown in myriad ways; save us from failing to be sensitive to Your call and Your authority. Challenge us by Your presence, and lead us in truth and love, so that we may be the truest agents of Yours and servants of all, by the power of the Holy Spirit. All praise to be You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Striving for what is right

Pray today for people in whatever circumstance, who feel that they must 'blow the whistle' on illegal, corrupt or bad practice within their place of work. Unfortunately, few societies are good at helping and protecting those who do everyone a great service by exposing bad practice. Ask the Lord to help such people and to work through His people the Church to assist them.

## Meditation

*(a meditation based upon 1 Timothy 6:11)*

Do I rise to the challenge of God's righteousness and peace?

Do I know what it means? Do I care to find out?

Do I build my life on what 'godliness' means?

Or am I too worried about what others might think?

Do I profess to have faith, and search endlessly for truth?

Or am I scared of God, or do I struggle with doubt?

Do I demonstrate love to all, not just those for whom I care?

Or do I accept the challenge to love the loveless, like Christ?

Do I have the real faith to endure being tested?

Or do I shy away from the truth, and give up on the church?

Do I take care to be gentle and follow the Lord in love?

Or do I hold myself back from being used by Him?

Do I 'fight the good fight' following the example of my Lord?

I pray so, Lord Jesus, I pray so.

## Bible Study - Hebrews 4:6-11

<sup>6</sup> Therefore since it is still open for some to enter it, and those who previously received the good news failed to enter it because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> He has once more set a day, this very day; having spoken through David over a long period of time in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' <sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about some other day. <sup>9</sup> Therefore a Sabbath rest is still available for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> and those who enter God's rest also stop from their own efforts just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> So let us spare no effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fail because of the same kind of disobedience.

## Review

It can be very hard to follow Hebrews when taking small texts from what is a very long and extended passage of Scripture about receiving the promises of God. What the writer is talking about in this passage is the promised 'rest' of God. Now, when God finished creation, he took delight in enjoying what he had done in a day of rest, called the 'Sabbath'; and at the heart of what is said in Hebrews is the Jewish belief that the Exodus from Egypt and entry into the Promised Land was a spiritual example of God's salvation and deliverance into a promised 'rest'. Once Joshua had subdued the land, the people of Israel were able to enjoy it and worship the Lord in security (see Joshua 23:1f.) This 'rest' in the Promised Land failed when

the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah were destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians as recorded in the Old Testament, and yet the writer of Hebrews saw in David's psalm (Psalm 95, previously quoted in Hebrews 3:7f. and 15) the prophetic promise of another chance of entering God's spiritual, heavenly 'rest', which was fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews the idea of the Sabbath is used to indicate the full assurance of salvation experienced through faith in Jesus (whose name is the same as the Hebrew 'Joshua', meaning salvation). However, he is concerned firstly for Jewish people who have failed to accept this both in the past and in his own day, and also (as we saw in the previous study), those who claimed a certain degree of faith in Jesus, but could not go as far as confessing full assurance of salvation because of unresolved deep-rooted personal insecurities. The writer of Hebrews believed that 'hardness of heart' was the main reason why people failed to find God's 'rest', and even those who thought they had 'missed the boat' of salvation because of their own failings were also guilty of hardening their hearts. At the centre of our text today lies the writer's deeply held belief, rooted in Scripture, that 'a Sabbath rest is still available for the people of God' (4:9), whatever people might think or however hard their hearts may be. He is insistent (4:7) that David's words remain true, even 'today'.

This, of course, is the call of the evangelist. God's heart is always open, positive, waiting, and willing for people to take advantage of His offer through Jesus Christ of obtaining the 'rest' of the assurance of salvation. Jewish people had promised themselves to God in a great Covenant service of worship when the Promised Land was at peace (Joshua 24), but they fell into sin and failed to find rest in the land God promised them. Today, people commit themselves to the Lord in a variety of services of renewal, Covenant services, Baptism services, Eucharists and services of commitment to name but a few, but many of the same people will tell you that they do not have the full assurance of their salvation in Jesus Christ, and their spirits are not at rest even though they know God's promises and a little of what the presence of Christ means!

Why is it that we too easily accept a little bit of Christian faith is enough for someone to be a Christian? Too many people think they have some kind of faith in Christ, but have hardened their hearts towards any further assurance of faith, or work of the Spirit, or deeper commitment, or more sacrificial giving, for example. In addition, they do not have 'peace' with God even though they go to church. As Hebrews says 'let us spare no effort to enter that rest', it is a call to all God's people to reject anything less than the full assurance of their salvation in Christ. This is the call of the evangelist not to the heathen, but to the people of God!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. To what extent do people in your own church need to hear the Gospel of Christ and claim it for themselves?
2. What does it mean when this text says 'those who enter God's rest stop from their own efforts'?
3. Is it entirely new for you to think of 'salvation' as similar to God's 'Sabbath', as is indicated in the letter to the Hebrews?

## Discipleship

Do your best to reflect upon this passage of Scripture, and decide at which point the Lord's voice is speaking to you. Even as I write this, I ask myself whether I truly experience the 'rest' which God wants me to have through trusting in Him. I wonder whether I have been hard of heart in some matters and not accepted His care and love? We know that Jesus has said that our lives will not be without trial and distress, but the 'rest' or 'peace of God' will carry us through such times. We need to see these broad brush-strokes of faith in our life's experience.

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You have ascended to heaven and sent Your Holy Spirit to us on earth. May we always be ready to feel the touch of Your Spirit and follow the leading and empowering of the same Spirit, whatever the cost. Save us from hardness of heart which is satisfied with life as it is now, we pray. Thank You Lord Jesus: AMEN