

Prayer

You do powerful and extraordinary things, Lord God, and any miracle that happens to us is a glorious touch of your compassionate hand. You guide our lives through the ordinary and the extraordinary, and we praise you for both. May we recognise each when such miracles happen and give glory to You, Lord God, our magnificent Father in heaven. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Church Triumphant

Over the centuries, the Church of God has been divided as people have found it necessary to break free from restrictions which have prevented the Holy Spirit from doing His work. Now all those involved are in unity with our Lord in heaven, and are at peace in Him. Pray that this vision might inspire us to deal with the divisions which are present in the church today.

Meditation

Hold me together, Lord;

As I seek to walk the path of faith.

Help me think about things clearly,

And grant me the gift of wisdom.

Help me to understand things correctly,

So that my mind will be transformed.

Help me to see things with eyes of faith,

In order to perceive the Kingdom.

Help me to hear things with empathy,

And respond with the love of Christ.

Help me to endure all things gladly,

Knowing I am never, ever, alone.

Hold me together, Lord;

I am Yours, to find fullness of life.

Bible Study - Hebrews 7:11-14

¹¹ Now, if perfection was to be found through the Levitical priesthood, given that it was the means whereby the people obtained the law, what more could possibly be needed which required the raising of another priest (according to the order of Melchizedek) because it did not exist in the order of Aaron? ¹² For when the priesthood is changed, it is necessary for the law to be changed as well; ¹³ for the One we are talking about belonged to another tribe from which no-one has ever served at the altar, ¹⁴ and it is very obvious that our Lord was a descendant of Judah, and Moses said nothing about that tribe concerning priesthood.

Review

It is passages like this one which make the average Christian read on quickly through Hebrews, searching for the parts which talk about Christ! What is said reads like a detailed discussion about the ancient Levitical priesthood which has nothing to do with the church today; moreover, it eventually hints at Christ (see verse 14) but the progress of the argument is not always clear, and neither is it clear why Hebrews spends so much time on this subject, comparing Christ with Melchizedek and Levitical priests. We may feel that once we have accepted Christ's everlasting priesthood we have all we need, and we can happily forget the 'Old Testament past'. That, however, would be unwise.

What we must remember is that for many early Christians, there was a basic objection to talking about Christ as a 'priest', which was that Jesus was not a Jew of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of Moses and Aaron set aside by God for priestly service. They would be happy to talk about

Jesus as a king and Messiah, because he was descended from King David. Now some might say that this hardly matters because Jesus is our Saviour; so what more could we want? It was important for the writer to argue that Jesus was a priest, however, in order to help us understand some crucial facts about Jesus and what he did for us, as we will see in the coming verses. This passage is the beginning of what Hebrews teaches us about the all-sufficient nature of Christ's sacrificial work for us, and the heavenly and spiritual nature of Christ's priesthood (7:1-8:7); and this leads the writer towards the climax of the letter, which is his description of a new covenant of faith which Christ established between God and His people (8:8f.). It will help us therefore to follow the passage carefully, to see how he comes to this important conclusion.

To start with, Hebrews says in verse 11 and 12, albeit in a rather roundabout way, that the old Levitical priesthood in Israel was imperfect and needed changing so that God could do His work of salvation through Christ. This perspective is essential so that Christians, to this day, can say that we do not now have to obey the detailed laws of sacrifice and worship set out in Leviticus, for example. They may have been what God wanted for Old Testament times, and they do teach us a great deal about sin, worship and many other things, but this 'law' has been changed (7:12)! Scripture never simply abandons the past as if it is irrelevant, it explains clearly (if sometimes rather slowly) how we get from the past to the present.

Obviously, this passage argues that Jesus' priesthood is like that of Melchizedek precisely because neither Jesus nor Melchizedek had any connection with the tribe of Levi; but that did not stop God using either of them as a priest. God is sovereign in His world and can do within it what He wants. Although Hebrews does not say it here in this text, the logical consequence of this is that through Jesus Christ, God is able to use all of us who believe in Him as 'priests' within the world, and just as we are the 'body of Christ' in the world today, we are, through Jesus, a 'priesthood of all believers'. What does this priesthood mean? It does not mean we go around sacrificing animals as Levi's descendants did, because the law has been changed (see verse 12). However, we do express our priesthood by following in the footsteps of Jesus as His disciples, and doing what He did, which was to minister to the world with the love of God by spreading the good news of the Kingdom, by every means possible.

I suggest that whatever you think of the word 'priest' or 'priesthood', surely none of us who call ourselves by the name of Christ can avoid this, for it comes straight from Scripture itself. If, according to our passage (7:14), Jesus was a descendant of David who was ordained a priest to serve the world by God Himself, then as His followers, so are we.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group whether you feel that you understand this passage. If you do not, at what point do you 'miss' what is said? (Help each other with this)
2. In what ways does this passage give you an understanding of what your own priesthood should be?
3. Would it have made a difference if Jesus had been a descendant of Levi rather than of Judah?

Discipleship

It may seem hard that Scripture constantly throws up the notion that we must be this or that, or doing this or that in order to follow His will. We can sometimes feel as if we have hurdles to jump rather than a life to live! In reality, if we have truly yielded to God, then these things found in Scripture will become natural to us because God is at work in us. We cannot escape the all-consuming challenges of faith, but we can discover how God enables us to do His will through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Final Prayer

Your will, Lord Jesus Christ, is to love and love until this love is accepted or rejected. We praise You for the love You have shown us and rejoice that you have led us to accept it. We pray for all those who you still love and have not yet fully responded. We also grieve with you for those who have rejected Your love. Save us, Lord Jesus, save us. AMEN