

## Prayer

You have stored up for us great and wonderful things, Lord Jesus. Bring us into Your presence and show us the wonders of Your creative power, the glory of Your eternal plan and the abundance of Your love and compassion for all. May we always rejoice in the greatness of Your provision and remain confident in Your salvation, because our Saviour is our Friend. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Searching the soul

Our prayers this week explore what it means to search our souls. 'Soul' is a word which means 'living being', and in that sense, it means everything about you or me; so the opportunities are large. Today, ask the Lord to help you to be honest with God and yourself about the difficult things in your life. Pray for strength to face troubles, and courage to receive His help.

## Meditation

Give other people your blessing, and do the Lord's will;

Bless the sick with your prayers, your empathy and your care;

Bless the poor with your concern, your help and your money;

Bless the children with your interest, your sensitivity and your patience;

Bless the bereaved with your sympathy, your presence and your time;

Bless the unhappy with your attention, your support and your affirmation;

Bless the needy with your assistance, your kindness; and your humanity;

Bless the lonely with your company, your faithfulness and your assurance;

For as you bless others, you will find yourself blessed;

Liberated by the power and strength given back to you

By those you have sought to bless.

## Bible Study - Hebrews 7:23-28

<sup>23</sup> In addition, there were many previous priests whose death prevented them from remaining in office, <sup>24</sup> but He holds His priesthood permanently because He lives forever. <sup>25</sup> For this reason, He can save completely those who come to God through Him, since He lives forever to intercede for them. <sup>26</sup> It is right for us to have this kind of priest; holy, innocent, pure, separate from sinners and raised higher than the heavens. <sup>27</sup> Unlike the other priests, He does not need to sacrifice every day, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He did that once and for all when He offered Himself. <sup>28</sup> Now, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the solemn oath which came after the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

## Review

Here, the priesthood of Jesus is finally shown to be superior to what had gone before in the Old Testament, as Hebrews pulls together most of what is found about this in chapter 7, including the permanence of the priesthood of Christ (7:23,24), the complete nature of what Christ has done for us (7:25), and the fact that His work was done 'once and for all' (7:27). As in yesterday's study, there are also a number of helpful and fascinating additions, which help us understand even more about the amazing work of Christ as our one and only 'priest'.

In verse 25, Hebrews says 'He can save completely those who come to God through Him ...' and this is possible because Jesus has been raised to life and prays for us continually! Therefore, salvation is complete and eternal because He lives forever! This is a central doctrine of Christian faith, and one that has not been as well understood in recent times as we might think. Many people treat 'salvation' as something that happened when they were 'saved',

with their Christian life developing from this, including all kinds of ups and downs of faith and also periods of doubt; people will call this their 'spiritual journey'. This is not what we should expect of the Christian life from Scripture. The famous evangelist John Wesley emphasised in His preaching that not only could people be saved, they could know they were saved, and moreover, know they were saved 'completely' (or as he said, 'to the uttermost'). This crucial part of his message had its roots in this very Scripture. God does not intend that we live a life of discipleship in which our faith waxes and wanes according to the pattern of life we lead. The Gospel says that through Christ we can have complete assurance that we are saved, and therefore have confidence to face all things. This is what makes it possible, for example, to be 'joyful' in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:17), because once we know true salvation, it is complete, and nothing can eclipse the sure and certain hope of what we have attained.

Jesus is also described in this passage from Hebrews as 'holy, innocent, pure, separate from sinners and raised higher than the heavens' (7:26). This is a description of the perfection in which Jesus lived and to which He was raised after His death; and it was a perfection which enabled Jesus to be raised from death and win our salvation! The testimony of His life is contained in the Gospels, which invite us to make our own judgements about Him, and the Gospels are confident that what He said and did was compelling evidence of His sinless purity and qualification to be the 'Son of God' (e.g. see John 1:29,30; 20:31). After His life and death, He was raised to life in the resurrection; but after that, He ascended through the heavens 'to the Father' (Acts 1:11) not just in order to give us the Holy Spirit and leave the disciples to get on with establishing the early church, but to return to His unity with the Father from where He could do His priestly ministry of interceding for us (7:25). The ascension is not celebrated in many churches. It really does need to be a part of our Christian calendar along with Easter and Pentecost (and Christmas)!

These crucial affirmations about the work of Christ are summarised by verse 28 which says the Jesus has been 'made perfect for ever'. In an age in which people are cautious about Christian doctrine, such words stand out as a clarion call to God's people to rediscover the essential truths of the Gospel and faith. I have often heard preachers tell people that 'doctrine doesn't matter', but they must 'believe in Jesus Christ and have faith in Him!' How extraordinary! It is Christian doctrine which defines and defends the historic truths of our faith. Christian doctrine speaks of Christ's purity, and the completeness and all-sufficiency of His work for our salvation. It also speaks of His priesthood by which we may have supreme confidence in His eternal support and prayer. Thank God for these truths.

## **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. How do you picture Jesus as existing today? Do you think of Him as saying prayers for You? If not, why not?
2. What does 'purity' mean when we speak about the purity of Jesus' life? How can we explain this in the world today?
3. In what ways does it help us to know that Jesus was 'perfect'? Is it realistic to aim to be perfect like Jesus?

## **Discipleship**

In today's study, I have issued a challenge to you to consider that Christian doctrine is not to be thought of as being at the root of Christian division or deviancy from the truth of the Gospel. Such fruits are the fruit of sin, and if Christian doctrine has created division, it is because of the sin of those who have those who have formulated it and interpreted it, rather than the fault of doctrine itself. All of us need to measure ourselves against the doctrinal standards of faith found in Scripture, however differently we interpret it; and we need to seek unity in our understanding of Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Church.

## **Final Prayer**

You are the one and true God, Almighty Father and Lord of all. By Creation, You mark the world with the signs of Your ownership, and You alone hold the secrets of how to overcome evil and its attempts to distort the good within the world. Praise be to You, our one and only true God. AMEN