

## Prayer

Gracious Lord; we worship You and call on You to pour out Your Spirit again and again on Your people, convicting them of sin and empowering them to be a people who are on the march for righteousness and justice. Strengthen your church in faith, in love, and in hope, and may the gifts of the Holy Spirit enable Your people to do Your will; may Your Kingdom come: AMEN!

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Searching the soul

Pray today to ask the Lord to help you with those things you find difficult within your faith; it may be something you are called to do but find hard, or some feature of the church you find difficult, for example. Pray and ask the Lord to reveal how you should deal with these things, knowing that He wants you to find peace through love, and hope through faith.

## Meditation

Brother, sister, what is really new within our world?

New technologies arrive each day; new ways to communicate,

New things to see and explore, new styles and fashion,

New books to read, and the internet with infinite capacity.

Even now, the old has gone, and what is now is always passing;

Each man or woman (in the West) creates a culture of their own

According to their needs and personal security, sharing only as they wish.

So has the human soul been changed by this?

Are we different people now? And do we function differently?

Or are we all the same despite the many changes?

For all the answers to these questions, which are many,

Remember, God has breathed His Holy Spirit into every life,

And He who created our potential judges it in wisdom, for He sees its end.

Not least, He judges by the unending scandal

Of those who starve and die right now, are sexually enslaved,

Manipulated by dictators or trapped by politics, control and fear!

Unless we face this reality with all our God-given potential, and change it,

Our selfish world yields nothing really new which will not die with us in sin.

God save the poor! And if you think this Gospel call is new; hear this, it's not!

## Bible Study - Hebrews 8:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Now the summary of what we are saying is this: we have a high priest who is indeed like this, One who has sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens! <sup>2</sup> One who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up not by mortals but by the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Now every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, so it was necessary for this priest also to have had something to offer. <sup>4</sup> If He were here on earth, He would not be a priest, as there are already priests here who offer gifts according to the law. <sup>5</sup> They offer a copy or shadow of heavenly service, which is why Moses was warned as he was about to complete the tabernacle; 'Make sure that you do everything according to the plan shown to you on the mountain.' <sup>6</sup> But Christ now operates a far superior ministry, as he is the mediator of a covenant which is far better, because it is based upon better promises.

## Review

By the admission of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, this is the 'heart of the matter'. It is what the first sentence of this passage says, and it arrests our attention after the previous sections of the letter which for some, are quite difficult to understand (notably chapter 7). The focus of this passage is directly upon Christ and His priestly ministry, and even if we have to examine the text carefully, the overall message is clear enough. Jesus has concluded His earthly work, and is now in God's presence, offering us priestly help which is 'far superior' (8:6)

to anything known in the Old Testament. Indeed, it is a 'better Covenant' (8:6). In the context of the whole Bible, what this means is that the Covenant relationship we may have with God through Jesus Christ is complete, because Jesus pleads for us in the presence of the Father.

Verse 1 begins by telling us what we know, which is that Jesus has finished his earthly work and is in the presence of the Father. The previous verses of chapter 7 describe Jesus as our priest because He serves us by saving us through His death, and also prays for us before God in Glory. In our passage Jesus is not mentioned until the end, but there is no doubt that He is the 'One' referred to in verses 1 and 2. The language of the verse is interesting, because in the Old Testament, a priest would stand to serve, but Jesus is described here as sitting, which is not a very priestly position! Hebrews however is unashamed to say that Jesus, our priest, also reigns as our King, and therefore 'sits' in a regal position which denotes the power and authority He has with God the Father. To a Jew, it would have been scandalous to put together the idea of kingship and priesthood. For a Christian, it is exactly what we believe about Christ!

Hebrews then spends the next four verses making a comparison between Jesus and the earthly priests of Aaron's lineage, who served God by means of gifts and sacrifices in the old 'tabernacle', first built under instruction from Moses and as described in Exodus 25 and 26. This was the original 'dwelling place of God' on earth, carried by the people of Israel through the desert on their journey from Egypt to Canaan. It consisted of a box called the 'Ark of the Covenant' containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments, which was housed in a small tent complex entered by priests when offering 'gifts and sacrifices' (8:3). This was itself housed in a large tented but open area large enough for groups of people to gather. Both the small inner tent and the large outer one were sometimes called 'the tabernacle'.

Hebrews emphasises that what was done in the tabernacle was only a 'copy or shadow' of God's greater plan, and tells us that this is why Moses was ordered by God to stick to the plan he was given (8:5). He was not to elaborate on it! What then does Jesus do for us as our high priest which is so much better (8:6)? Some Christians believe that Jesus continually offers himself and his blood for our sins, but that is not what this passage says. If you read verse 3 carefully, the tense of the verbs make this clear; 'it was necessary for this priest also to have had something to offer' (8:3). In other words, Jesus' work on the Cross is finished and not repeated (7:27), and something which we enter into by our baptism (6:1f.). The work Christ does for us now is that of a 'mediator' of a 'Covenant which is far better' (8:6). Tomorrow, we will find out more about what this Covenant is, though from the Old Testament we know that a 'Covenant' describes a relationship with God. For now, the word 'mediator' explains that Christ tells us about God, and crucially, tells God about us. He stands 'between' us (which is what 'mediator' means).

It is remarkable to think that Jesus represents us to God and intercedes for us before our Maker. This is His priestly work for us now that He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. He does not repeat His own, or any other sacrifice, but prays for us.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss what you believe Jesus does for you as your great 'high priest'.
2. How much of this passage is relevant to people's belief in Jesus Christ today?
3. Discuss in your group how much you know about the Old testament 'tabernacle', and read Exodus 25 and 26 if necessary to check out your facts.

## Discipleship

If you hold a discussion with people, they have a wide variety of views about what Jesus does for us and how He does it. This passage of Scripture is categorical about Jesus' intercession for us, so do you think that people know that Jesus prays for them today? Do you think of Jesus like this yourself? We all know that helping people and praying for them can be demanding, so there is no question that this is an important part of Jesus' ministry. Reflect upon what it means for Jesus to pray for you; what might He be praying about!

## Final Prayer

Help us, Lord Jesus, to pray for other people with care and regularity. Teach us how to pray for people who are in need; for those who have earthly needs and those who have spiritual needs. Teach us also how to pray for those who need to know Your love, Lord Jesus, and may we be instruments of Your compassion and care; AMEN