

Prayer

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. We worship You with every means we have at our disposal this day. Place a song in our hearts and inspire us by Your Word; lead us out of spiritual danger and into those places of peace where we can fulfil our potential because You are with us. Praise be to You, Jesus Christ our Saviour. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Media and the World

We will pray this coming week about the way the media affects the world in which we live. We read the news, watch television or read magazines and books, and this is the world as we understand it; reported to us often by people who have their own agenda concerning what they think we should know. Start by praying for the media in your own country.

Meditation

Steady is the hand directed by the power of the Holy Spirit;

Jesus, take my hands in Yours.

Strong is the heart inspired by the holiness of the Lord;

Jesus, purify my heart.

Healthy are the feelings fed by the Comforter, the Advocate;

Jesus, liberate my emotions.

Powerful is the mind tutored by the Holy Scriptures;

Jesus, feed me from the Word.

Visionary is the spirit which prophesies by the Lord's authority;

Jesus, reveal Yourself to me.

Eloquent are the lips which speak out the Good News of Grace;

Jesus, may I honour Your name.

Firm are the feet walking the timeless pathways of Faith;

Jesus, guide me on Your way.

Infinite are the ways of the Almighty with His Creation;

Jesus, be glorified, even in me.

Bible Study - Hebrews 9:23-28

²³ It was therefore necessary for the replicas of the heavenly things to be purified in these ways, but the heavenly things themselves require superior sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a holy place put together by human hands as a copy of the true one, but he entered heaven itself, in order to appear now, on our behalf, before the presence of God. ²⁵ He did not do this to offer himself repeatedly, just as the high priest enters the Holy Place each year with blood that is not his own, ²⁶ in which case, he would have had to suffer over and over again from when the world was made; but he has now appeared on one unique occasion, at the close of this age, to do away with sin by his own sacrifice. ²⁷ In the same way that mortal people die once, and after that face judgement, ²⁸ so Christ was offered only once to bear the sins of many others, and will appear a second time, not to remove sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him expectantly.

Review

This glorious reading sums up all that the letter of Hebrews has said about the unique work of Christ for our salvation and presents it as a summary of the Gospel, also adding some helpful insights about 'heavenly things' (9:23,24), and the future judgement (9:27:8). It tells us that Jesus did what the old covenant could not do because of its inherent limitations as a copy of 'heavenly things' (9:24), and whereas the old High Priests repeatedly entered the tabernacle to perform a partial sacrifice to remove human sin, Jesus has entered the presence of God in heaven itself, and presented the 'blood' of his own sacrifice, which is sufficient to remove all human sin and open up the way for all to have access to God. This truth has been at the heart

of Christian theology and the preaching of the church for centuries. It is the Gospel we proclaim, through which we invite people to accept Jesus' work for them by faith and receive the assurance that He saves them from sin and death, giving them access to the Father.

The first helpful insight comes in verse 23, which describes the old tabernacle as a 'replica' of 'heavenly things'. There has been much speculation as to what this may mean, but the simplest explanation is that the entire heavens are like the whole world; both are under the ultimate authority of God and nothing can escape from His gaze or general presence, but good and bad, godliness and sin, exist in both, side by side. However, just as the tabernacle represented an earthly place where God dwelt alone and sin was forbidden, there is a place in heaven where evil and sin cannot go, a heavenly tabernacle which contains a 'holy place' where God alone dwells in the majesty of His Holiness. The old rituals were performed on earth and reflected in heaven, but what Jesus did through his death, resurrection and ascension, was performed on earth and equally in heaven. Jesus therefore came into the presence of God Almighty in the heavenly places to win our eternal salvation (9:24,28).

If we are to explore this understanding of our world and the heavenly world, then we will need to examine and assess more scriptures, which we cannot do here. However, the picture of the nature of heaven which is presented here is so powerful it invites us to reflect on far more than the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ, even though it is central to our faith. This is reflected in the way that this reading itself concludes with another insight into heavenly things which are not to do with what Christ has done for us once only in the past, but what He will do for us once only in the future, and it is all to do with judgement. In verse 27, the writer describes the way that ordinary people die once, and after that, they face the judgement of God. The writer appeals to our common understanding of human destiny, and he goes on to say that in the same way, as Jesus has died for our sins, He will then 'appear a second time'. Now the logic of this is that this second appearance must therefore be the 'judgement' just spoken about, for Jesus will not come again to do what He has done before!

The letter of Hebrews therefore makes a close link between the saving work of Jesus and the final judgement of God on all things, and it is a link which is not so commonly made today in our evangelism and mission (though our forefathers found it easier to do this than we). The subject of the second coming of our Lord is one that has created great confusion and distress amongst Christians, and many avoid it because of misunderstandings. Scripture will not let us forget, however, that the Gospel of Christ we proclaim is also about our eternal judgement and destiny; for the two are intertwined. The good news is that if we have accepted the real Gospel, then our future judgement and appearance before God is a matter of awesome joy and anticipation (9:28), because we know that Jesus prays for us before the Father, and we have total confidence in Him.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group the picture of heaven described in the study. What features of this make sense to you, and what do they mean?
2. In what ways can we proclaim a Gospel which speaks about our eternal destiny, and not make it impossibly difficult for people to understand?
3. Do you believe the end of time and eternal judgement to be something we should be worried about today? If so, why? And if not, why not?

Discipleship

Have you ever thought much about the way that earthly things reflect heavenly things? The real challenge is for us to have a realistic concept of 'heavenly things', because this links very powerfully with what we mean by the 'spiritual' world. Increasingly in the western world, spiritual values and spiritual ways of doing things are pushed out even from the life of the church, and instead of allowing the world's way of doing things to assist our higher spiritual tasks, we often tag the 'spiritual' along with the earthly (usually by saying a prayer!). When the Lord brings renewal, His people will rediscover the importance of spiritual things.

Final Prayer

Be at the centre of my life, Lord Jesus. Be with me when I am hurting and when I am fulfilled, when I am empty and when I am full to overflowing, when I am troubled and when I feel as free as a bird. But most of all, Lord Jesus, stay by my side in those moments when nothing particular is happening, for that can be when you are closest. Thank You, Lord: AMEN