

Prayers

Thoughts on prayer

As people in many nations find their homes shattered by war, young people try to escape the carnage by travelling across the world to seek work and a new future. They are often the economic migrants politicians and media love to hate. Yet here are human beings with no chance of a life without escaping the chaos of their homelands and acting illegally. Yes, we reject these people from our borders; but please pray, in the name of God, what are we doing?

A prayer for today

Jesus, Lord of all, show us more of Yourself this day. May we find You within every situation we hear of and in which we find ourselves; not because you have come as a result of our request, but because You are everywhere, and You love to be with those who suffer and need help, all the time. Give us hearts to appreciate and value Your compassion and Your presence Lord Jesus, Saviour of all: AMEN

Meditation

If you are troubled by something that has taken place:

- Something you never thought would happen;
- Something done by someone, close to you;
- Something you want to forgive, yet troubles still.

Where do you go with your faith and your will?

- Do you become angry, tell God what you think?
- Do you say nothing to God, forget your faith?
- Do you pray and search endlessly for peace?

What will you do? Will your faith hold in life's trials?

- Will you offend God, hurt others, harm yourself?
- Will you seek the Lord, be consumed by distress?
- Will love constrain your anger, or break out?

You cannot hide this; each one face such tests.

Life's furnace refines faith, and only Christ sustains.

Bible Passage

Hebrews 2:10-15

¹⁰ In order to lead many children to glory, it was right that God, for whom and by whom all things exist, should make perfect through sufferings the one who pioneered their salvation. ¹¹ So then both the one who makes people holy and

those who are being made holy come from the same family, and He is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² He says,

'I will declare Your name to my brothers and sisters; I will praise You in the midst of the congregation.'

¹³ Again,

'I will put my trust in Him.'

And again,

'I am here, with the children God has given me.'

¹⁴ Since, then, the children share flesh and blood in common, He has shared the same Himself, so that through death He might destroy the one who has power of death, meaning the devil, ¹⁵ and free those who have been held in slavery throughout their lives by the fear of death.

Review

SUMMARY

God has determined that the suffering of Jesus 'pioneers' our salvation. Because He is both holy but also a person like us, He is able to defeat the power of death and through His grace open up a pathway of holiness we can accept by faith, and which makes us acceptable in the presence of Almighty God!

Hebrews has already told us that Jesus was God's Son, not an angel, as some people in those days thought. It tells us that Jesus is God's Son, come to earth to do the work of salvation through His death and resurrection, and now returned to heaven where He is firmly installed at God's right hand (2:9). Today, most Christians will say 'Amen' to this at least before moving on. However, if we stay with Hebrews a little, we will learn more. The letter attempts to convince Jews of the day of the Gospel, and as it does so, we will learn more about what Jesus has done. It talks about why Jesus had to share human nature and suffer; and explains that in so doing, the power of death is defeated. It is no small point and has significant implications.

Verse 10 - 'made perfect through sufferings'

Our passage begins with a theological masterpiece of a verse (2:10), combining the themes of salvation, creation, perfection and suffering. It tells us that God makes His salvation practically real by demonstrating that in Jesus, the Saviour, He has overcome suffering in this world.

This is a powerful message, but the way Hebrews reveals it is unique, perhaps endearing. It begins, *'in order to bring many children to glory'*, indicating God's passionate heart for the salvation of people. Glory of course is where God dwells, and Hebrews describes Him as wanting to bridge the barriers preventing people from having access to Him. This barrier is of course 'sin', and though Hebrews has yet to address this, it will.

Verse 10 honours God as creator, but its most interesting feature is its description of the pathway Jesus takes to 'pioneer' salvation, saying He is made '*perfect through sufferings*'. This could refer to Jesus' suffering on the Cross, surely the ultimate suffering endured by anyone. However, we should not discount the sufferings Jesus endured in His ministry; the abandonment of the disciples (Matthew 26), His misrepresentation by the religious authorities (Matthew 9,12), and the wiles of the evil one (Matthew 10,11). In truth, for Jesus to win salvation, He must endure every form of suffering for our sake, and this is what makes His work 'perfect', or 'complete' in God's eyes.

Verse 11 - all from the same family

Hebrews has already emphasised the divinity of Jesus (see chapter 1 - '*God has spoken to us through a Son ... the heir of all things*'), and here in verse 11, the letter emphasises His humanity. It is a simple verse, emphasising that Jesus, having come to earth to do God's work, becomes a person just like everyone else on earth; He is to be counted as '*from the same family*' as ordinary people.

Still, Jesus is of course holy. By comparison, people are not holy, and it is Jesus' task to offer people a route to holiness through His ministry. The word 'holy' means 'separate' in the sense that God Himself is separate from His creation because He is pure and perfect. So Jesus may be a human being whilst on earth but He does not lose this basic divine property, and remains '*holy*'. In this way, verse 11 sets the ground for the way Christians of later years speak of Jesus as both 'human and divine'. This is key to our understanding of Jesus and His ministry.

Verse 12 - a quote from Psalm 22:22

Keeping up the theme of justifying everything he says from Scripture, the writer of Hebrews pauses in his flow to offer us a quote from Psalm 22:22. Barring translation, the quote is virtually word for word, and it is fairly clear why it is used. It highlights the idea that Jesus calls people '*brothers and sisters*', but if we want to dig more deeply, we must look at more than verse 22 of Psalm 22.

This is the famous Psalm quoted by Jesus whilst on the cross, beginning, '*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me ...*' (Psalm 22:1). The whole Psalm was well known as one that was regarded as prophetic of the work and ministry of Jesus. Moreover, the Psalm as a whole begins with human despair at abandonment by God, and ends with sheer joy at God's redemption and salvation; '*I will live for Him ... and declare His deliverance to a generation as yet unborn!*' (Ps 22:30,31). The people to whom our writer was speaking knew this very well, and also understood that at the heart of the Psalm lies verse 22, in which the suffering servant turns to God to give Him glory for His deliverance! Yes, the divine man Jesus will do this work!

Verse 13 - Two supporting texts both from Isaiah 8:17-18

Two other quotes follow, which are from the end and beginning respectively of Isaiah 8:17 and 18. It may sound obvious to us that we should put our trust in Jesus, the divine man who will do God's work; and more than this, we should include our children, for the sake of the future!

However, there is a little more going on here. The prophet Isaiah has just endured a horrible encounter with King Ahaz who has refused to listen to his prophetic call for the king to listen and wait on the Lord God. Isaiah is furious at this rejection, and in his wrath pronounces probably the most famous prophecy of all time, declaring that in response to the King's rejection, God will '*give you a sign, look a woman is with child and will bear a son, and His name will be Immanuel*' (Isaiah 7:14). Further, in the heat of the prophetic moment, Isaiah

continues with other prophecies, all of them declaring that God will act to do His will if the kings of Israel will not. Isaiah eventually begins to calm down and in these beautiful verses, declares his personal trust in God and commits his own family into God's hands!

It may seem a big step from this to Hebrews, but the common themes are there. God's work of salvation will be done by His Immanuel, Jesus, the Son of God come to earth to be '*God with us*' (Matthew 1:17). Our salvation is found as we put our trust in Him, and that of our families!

Verses 14 and 15 - why victory over death?

Verses 14 and 15 now declare a further truth about salvation we need to know. The real enemy of humanity is death, and this is a truth we know but hardly ever dare to speak about because without reference to God, there are no options to it. Hebrews describes the devil as having the '*power of death*' and describes this as like a form of slavery which holds all humanity captive. If there is to be any meaningful talk of God's salvation, it cannot be in terms of nice warm words and simple religious sentiments. Real salvation can only be real deliverance from death into the loving hands of God our Maker.

It is clear that Jesus has come to suffer in this world so that there might be such a victory over evil and death that He is Himself the pathway of our salvation. As we read verse 14, it is surely with a great warmth that we accept its truth. Jesus is the same '*flesh and blood*' as us; He has destroyed death (through His resurrection), so in Him we may be set free! Alleluia!

Application

Discipleship issues

A pathway through suffering

Many Scriptures speak of the pathway of salvation which takes people through suffering into redemption and salvation. It sounds good, but is this really what we experience? I would rather put the issue the other way round. If we think we have found our salvation, but cannot connect with the idea that we have been saved from our sufferings and even death, then we have not yet understood the Christian message aright!

Many preachers of recent times have taken Old Testament examples of God's blessing and made it into a prosperity gospel based on being obedient to God and reaping benefits. It is claimed God will do this for His glory, but too often, such preachers are infamous for collecting big donations for their personal ministry, and clearly live a good life. This is simply not a reflection of the faithful witness of God's people either down through the ages or in Scripture.

The pathway to salvation is found through victory over suffering and utter trust in Christ. It certainly does not lead people to a place where there is perfect happiness and no suffering; oh dear, we try to make heaven on earth at our peril, for that is God's sovereign work.

Using Scripture because you know it

One of the beautiful aspects of these opening exchanges in Hebrews is the way the author repeatedly quotes Scriptures, often in sets of three or seven batches of quotes. The batches themselves show how important these issues are for Hebrews, but the way the letter uses Scripture is a lesson to us.

First, Hebrews has no difficulty connecting the Gospel message with the Old Testament. This is important because many Christians today find this very hard to do. They can of course make connections with the New Testament but not the Old; we need to study how the New Testament uses Old Testament Scripture if we are to gain the benefits of such insights, indeed, to know how to use Scripture as a whole.

Second, the swift recourse to Scripture comes from people who know their Scriptures very well. Too many people today say that they have little time for reading God's Word, yet I find that they are often regular and sometimes avid readers of religious works, from novels to light biographies, especially those reporting great works that have taken place across the world. I implore you to make reading Scripture a priority! Our fathers learned to read and write using Scriptures and consequently knew it, and often their unpretentious knowledge of God's Word puts us to shame. Let us be people of the 'Book', who know God's Word.

Questions for groups

- 1. What are the highlights of this passage for you? Write down the distinct features of this passage which explain salvation.*
- 2. How can we best explain the humanity and divinity of Jesus to people today, and what Scriptures might we use to justify this?.*
- 3. Why is it that Jesus has to die in order to defeat death and 'the devil'; discuss this and try to explain it using your own words.*

Final Prayer

Lord, I turn my eyes towards You, I look for Your help, I seek Your advice, and I long for Your presence in every moment of my life. Remove the unseen barriers, O Lord, and break into my consciousness with Your liberating power, I pray, and encourage me. Thank You, Lord: AMEN