

Prayer

Dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, empower us to do great things within this world, not for ourselves, but for Your Kingdom. We do not wish to become puffed up with pride at our achievements, but we long for Your Kingdom to come in power, and we want to make the Gospel heard by people who need its liberty and power to save. Break new ground in evangelism amongst us we pray! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)

Prayer ideas

Place your personal requests before the Lord by writing them down and reading them out. It seems rather pedantic, but the exercise can help us gain a focus on the many personal issues we pray about.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for your family.** *Pray for those in your family who are close to you. Pray for them in depth, and pray for their spirits; that God will be gracious to them in whatever state they are. Pray that they will enter into God's Kingdom and rest.*
- *Give thanks to God for the blessing of sight, and for the way in which it is possible in our own time to deal with most common eyesight problems*
- *Pray for the IMF as the controversies surrounding its managing director continue. Pray about this whole matter and its current implications*

Meditation

The things of God are immeasurable and inestimable:

His love is more precious to us than any gift we can receive;
His support is more steadfast than the foundations of a tower;
His grace is more awesome than any experience we may have;
His faithfulness is more consistent than the seasons of the earth;
His promises are more assured than any due processes of law;
His future is more certain than the science of an atomic clock;
His healing is more complete than the circle of the globe;
His salvation is more secure than the safest of homes;

And if we have problems, then it is us who must change.

Bible passage - Hebrews 5:5-10

⁵ Therefore Christ did not take glory for Himself when He became a High Priest, but the glory belonged to the One who said to Him, 'You are my Son, today I have become Your Father'; ⁶ as it says also in another place, 'You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.' ⁷ During the days of Jesus' earthly life, He offered up prayers and requests with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His fears. ⁸ Although He was a Son, He learned about obedience from what He suffered; ⁹ and once He was made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, ¹⁰ having been designated by God to be a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Bible Study

Review

In these few verses, Hebrews begins to tell us something about the nature of Jesus as our High Priest. In the previous verses we were told about how a Jewish High Priest represented people to God, and God to people (5:1-4), but this passage begins a major discussion in Hebrews about the priesthood of Christ which begins here, and then disappears for a couple of chapters, and then concludes in chapter 7. Hebrews tells us that Jesus is our one and only High Priest, who serves us in a better and more complete way than any previous priest in Judaism, and his work is on-going and all-sufficient for our salvation! In this passage, we are introduced to the idea, developed in chapter 7, that Jesus is divinely appointed by God, and he fully represents us to God and God to us. An illustration is made of the High Priest Melchizedek (5:6,10, and chapter 7), an Old Testament figure who appears in Genesis 14, and with whom we are largely unfamiliar; so we will have to make sure that we know something about who he is!

Hebrews tells us firstly that Jesus our High Priest is divinely appointed. It is most important to say 'Christ did not take glory for Himself' (5:5), because if He had done, His authority would have been more like that of a despot! No, Hebrews quotes Psalm 2:7 in which God gives authority to 'His Anointed', and declares Him to be His Son. This Psalm arose at a time when a king of Israel was thought of as the Lord's anointed, but after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586BC, there were no kings left of David's line and these words came to express a hope for God's anointed Messiah. Hebrews links this with the other famous Messianic quote from the Psalms (Psalm 110:4), another well used text in which God addresses His Messiah and appoints Him as a 'priest according to the order of Melchizedek'.

Although strange to us, the mention of Melchizedek was understood in the first century by Jews and Christians alike. He appears in Genesis 14, receiving gifts from Abraham after he had won a famous military victory to save his nephew Lot (and family). The important thing about Melchizedek was that he was unique, and appeared in Israelite History before there even was an Israel! He was therefore regarded as having a unique and special calling from God, and was therefore a forerunner of the Messiah and also of Christ. He was the perfect Old Testament example of a priest who was unique and specially appointed by God! The letter of Hebrews tells us this so that we may understand that God was capable of appointing whatever priests he wanted, quite apart from the traditional Jewish priests. He had the authority to appoint Jesus to be our sole High Priest!

The rest of this passage talks about Jesus' suffering whilst on earth, so that we might know that Jesus, whilst being our great High Priest, is also capable of understanding the darkest hours of our humanity. Verses 7 and 8 talk of the terrible time when Jesus prayed in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, fearing what was to come because of his natural human apprehension at what lay ahead. But Jesus reached a place where His fears were taken away; 'He learned obedience from what He suffered' (5:8), and he was therefore able to rise and face his final hours. Then, his being made 'perfect' (5:9) refers to his suffering and death on the Cross, which was the unique work done by Jesus in order to bring us salvation! So from Gethsemane to the Cross, Jesus walked a path which enabled Him to represent our humanity to God as our appointed High Priest!

The reading for today is a classic paragraph from Hebrews, and one that is remembered by most people who read this letter to the Hebrews. Amongst the many descriptions of Jesus in the New Testament, it graphically reminds us both of Jesus' humility, and also His power to save.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does it mean for you to know that you have a 'High Priest' who represents you to God?
2. What does it mean for you to know that you have a 'High Priest' who represents God to you?
3. Do you find it easy to think of Jesus as both fully human and also fully divine?

Personal comments by author

I know that I can turn to Jesus in prayer and He will hear my voice. He understands my humanity and the problems I face even though I struggle to present this to Him, and He has solutions to my problems.

Nevertheless, I cannot say this without pointing out that I do not always hear His voice, and I do not always gain a sense of what He thinks when I pray. When I say this it is a statement of faith, which is based on a long term appreciation of my relationship with Him. The Lord does not speak and communicate in the instant way we do in normal conversation, He makes His will known in thousands of different ways within everyday life; and when we know His voice, it is clear.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- **Something to do:** Write down a list of what you believe your weaknesses to be. If possible, speak to a friend and ask him or her to do the same for you, and compare their list with yours. Bring both before the Lord in prayer and seek His wisdom and forgiveness.
- **Something to pray about:** Pray about the effects of culture upon the church. Pray that God's people will be discerning about what is godly and what is worldly when it comes to the work it does within society.

Final Prayer

Your voice, Lord God, is like the whisper of a loved one, the call of a song-bird sounding its distinct call, the song of an ancient psalm sung to beautiful music, and a thousand other beautiful sounds. Give us discerning ears, which can hear You amidst all the sounds of life and respond to Your love: AMEN
