

Prayer

Jesus Christ, we find our peace in You. In You, we may know the victory of the Cross, the love of the Father, the care of the Christian community, the empowerment of the Spirit, and the wisdom of Your Word. May we never find ourselves doubting Your extraordinary power to bring peace to our souls in these ways. Thank You Jesus, You are the Son of the Living God. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Houses

Pray for people who live in sub-standard blocks of flats, and who have no hope of finding better accommodation for themselves or their families. Pray about the politics of housing.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for people who are in despair or suicidal*
- *Pray for the International Monetary Fund and its responsibilities*
- *Give thanks for the many people you know, and for friendship*

Meditation

This is the power God has given us in Christ;

The power of love, to restore the spirit,
The power of what is good, to help others,
The power of integrity, to sustain what is right,
The power of hope, to shine a beacon in the world,
The power of honesty, to keep hold of what is pure,
The power of self-control, to discipline the soul,
The power of boldness, to preach the Gospel,
The power of faith, to aspire to greater things,
The power of gentleness, to care for the lost.

The power of God is given to be used; receive it!

Bible Study - Hebrews 9:1-5

¹ Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. ² A tabernacle was constructed; the first one, in which there were the lamp stand, the table, and the bread of the Presence, was called the 'Holy Place'. ³ And behind the second curtain was a tabernacle called the 'Holy of Holies' ⁴ which had the golden altar of incense, and the Ark of the Covenant covered entirely with gold. In this was the golden jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of Glory overshadowing the mercy seat, but we cannot now speak of these things in detail.

Review

In yesterday's passage, Hebrews explained that God had promised to establish a new covenant, according to a great prophecy of Jeremiah. Now, the writer embarks on a long

chapter, which eventually explains this new covenant and the priestly work of Christ for all people. In order to do this, he firstly describes the magnificent scene of the place where the first covenant was celebrated, in the tabernacle. He does this because by describing the wondrous and inspiring magnificence of this ancient tent complex, made according to the instructions given to Moses in Exodus 25,26, he prepares us for a description of the far greater glory of the priestly work of Jesus. Hebrews consistently refuses to abandon the significance of Israel's past and all the ancient revelations given in Old Testament times. It argues that although it was less than what was revealed in Jesus, it prepares us for understanding and appreciating the more the glorious opportunities we now have by means of God's revelation through Jesus.

If we read the passages in Exodus that contain the original specification for the tabernacle (Ex 25,26,27), it is possible to make out the general details of what is described here (9:2-5). Two tents are described, a large outer tent creating a holy sanctuary, and a central tent within it which housed the Ark of the Covenant. Exodus also describes a 'mercy seat' (Ex 25:17) which is not mentioned here in Hebrews, and this covered the Ark and was overshadowed by two great cherubim, all covered in gold. Clearly, the contents of the Holy of Holies was intended to be magnificent, but it was only ever seen by those who made it and the priests who had the right of entry to perform priestly duties.

The main difference between the description in Exodus 25 and 26 and that in our passage of Hebrews was the jar of manna, which was kept for storage in the presence of the Lord (Ex 16:31f.) before the Tabernacle was built (Exodus 25,26). In addition, Hebrews mentions the rod of Aaron which budded (9:4) came from a much later incident in the journey of the people of Israel (Numbers 17:6f.), and its importance lies in the fact that it symbolised God's choice of the line of Aaron as priests according to the old covenant. The story goes that there were complaints to Moses about access to God in the holiest places of the tabernacle, so Moses placed a staff belonging to each of the tribes of Israel in the presence of God within the tabernacle. The next morning, Aaron's rod had budded and borne fruit! If you read the incident as it is recorded in Numbers 17, then it is fairly obvious that the rod remained in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. Lastly, the altar of incense was not a part of the original specification of the Holy of Holies, but was added later (Exodus 30) as the place where incense was offered each evening, and once a year, a sacrifice was made for the sins of the people (Exodus 30:10), the famous 'rite of atonement'.

All these things were wondrous and remarkable, and in the days of Jesus, they were known only from the writings of the Old Testament. We do not know for sure what happened to the tabernacle tent after the people of Israel came into the Promised Land, but we are told that the Ark itself was brought into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6f.) by David. It was placed eventually in the central chambers of the Temple built by Solomon, a new 'Holy of Holies' (see 1 Kings 8f.), and this was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC when Jerusalem and the Temple were razed to the ground. It is no wonder that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, 'we cannot now speak of these things in detail' (9:5).

Few of us, however, can fail to be impressed by the scale and grandeur of these physical representations of the religious devotion of the people of the old covenant. However, it is obvious where the letter to the Hebrews is heading. Nothing of this is comparable to the value of knowing the one true revelation of God, which is found in Jesus Christ! No religion or religious system can compare with knowing God personally through God's own Son Jesus Christ. Moreover, the reason why God gave His people the impressive heritage of the tabernacle was so that all God's people might see the glory of Jesus Christ as far greater than any religion object or symbolism, whether impressive symbolism, objects of silver or gold, inspiring rituals or inspired history. To this day and forever, Christ stands above all things, and in a far greater glory.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways do people construct objects or rituals that are used for the worship of God, and do they help or hinder worship?
2. How helpful is it to have physical reminders of God's work amongst us within our church buildings?
3. Imagine yourself what the 'Holy of Holies' looks like. Within your group, discuss what you can picture, and what catches your attention in this mental picture.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Do you think that it is wise or helpful for Christian to have visual reminders of the works of God decorating the walls of their churches? Christian people about 300 years ago would have been aghast at the idea of placing any objects within a church building, and many threw out statues and painted over murals. English churches today display a very mixed approach to this. My question remains important, however, for each of must make sure we are not attached to the trappings of worship rather than our Lord Himself. Honour Him, and let all else take its place.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What objects have you seen in other churches that have inspired your worship? Is it possible to draw up rules for what should be accepted and what should not?*
- *If possible, try to discuss this issue with people from other churches who have a very different view of these things to you. You will find that talking about such things can open up your own understanding of these things considerably.*

Final Prayer

Help me, Lord Jesus, to open my heart so that I may appreciate my brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they may be, and in whatever circumstances they live. May I always be prepared to learn from them more of the workings of the Body of Christ, and be encouraged by their worship of the true and Living God. AMEN