

## Prayer

You have stored up great and wonderful things for Your people, Lord Jesus. Bring us into Your presence and show us the wonders of Your creative power, the glory of Your eternal plan, the abundance of Your love and compassion, and Your desire that all might turn to You. We rejoice in Your provision and the glory of Your salvation, for You are both our Saviour and our Friend. ALLELUIA!

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Houses

*Pray about the building of houses in your country. Governments sometimes assist and sometimes hinder people who want to build houses, so pray about house-building policy.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those employed in gathering tax for governments*
- *Pray for the continuing worldwide concerns about swine fever*
- *Give thanks for what the Lord God has done to bless you today*

## Meditation

Do the Lord's will, and work to give others your blessing;  
Do for others the things you would have them do for you.

Bless the needy with your assistance, your kindness; and your humanity;  
Bless the sick with your prayers, your empathy and your encouragement.

Bless the poor with your concern, your help and your money;  
Bless the lonely with your company, your faithfulness and your assurance.

Bless the children with your interest, your sensitivity and your patience;  
Bless the aged with your company, your compassion and your care.

Bless the bereaved with your sympathy, your presence and your time;  
Bless the unhappy with your attention, your support and your affirmation.

For as you strive to bless others, you will be blessed yourself;  
Liberated by love given back to you by those you have blessed.

## Bible Study - Hebrews 7:23-28

<sup>23</sup> *In addition, there were many previous priests whose death prevented them from remaining in office,* <sup>24</sup> *but He holds His priesthood permanently because He lives forever.* <sup>25</sup> *For this reason, He can save completely those who come to God through Him, since He lives forever to intercede for them.* <sup>26</sup> *It is right for us to have this kind of priest; holy, innocent, pure, separate from sinners and raised higher than the heavens.* <sup>27</sup> *Unlike the other priests, He does not need to sacrifice every day, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He did that once and for all when He offered Himself.* <sup>28</sup> *Now, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the solemn oath that came after the law appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.*

## Review

Here, the letter to the Hebrews finally offers its conclusive proof about why the priesthood of Jesus is superior to all that has gone before in the Old Testament. The letter pulls together most of what is said about the priesthood of Jesus in chapter 7, including the permanence of the priesthood of Christ (7:23,24), the complete nature of what Christ has done for us (7:25), and the fact that His work was done 'once and for all' (7:27). As before, the letter adds helpfully to the whole complex matter by giving us one or two further insights, which help us understand even more about the amazing work of Christ as our one and only 'priest'.

In verse 25, Hebrews says about Jesus; 'He can save completely those who come to God through Him ...' and explains that this is possible because He has been raised to life and prays for us continually before the Father! Consequently, our salvation is complete and eternal because Jesus lives forever and never ceases His ministry! This is a central doctrine of Christian faith, and it is one that has not been well understood in recent times. Many people treat 'salvation' as an event that happened when they were 'saved'; consequently, their Christian life develops from this and includes all kinds of ups and downs of faith and also periods of doubt, something called a 'spiritual journey'. This is not what we should expect of the Christian life from Scripture. The famous evangelist John Wesley emphasised in His preaching the scriptural doctrine that not only could people be saved, they could know they were saved, moreover, they could know they were saved 'completely' (or in his words, 'to the uttermost'). This crucial part of Wesley's message has its roots in this very scripture we are studying today. God does not intend that we live a life in which our faith waxes and wanes according to our troubles and doubts. Through Christ, we can have complete assurance of our salvation, and although we may be tempted to question this, dealing with such doubts is not the focus of our 'spiritual journey'. The real spiritual journey is that of active discipleship, which is about learning, growing and achieving more of God's will through Christ. Nothing can eclipse the sure and certain hope of faith we have in Christ, and doubts are conquered by this faith.

Jesus is also described in this passage from Hebrews as 'holy, innocent, pure, separate from sinners and raised higher than the heavens' (7:26). This is a description of the true perfection of Jesus, which enabled Him to be raised from death and win our salvation! The testimony of His perfect life is contained in the Gospels, and this evidence invites us to make our own judgements about Him. The Gospels are confident that what He said and did was compelling evidence of His sinless purity and qualification to be the 'Son of God' (e.g. see John 1:29,30; 20:31). They are confident in this because after His life and death, He was raised to life in the resurrection; but after that, the Scriptures testify to even more. He ascended 'to the Father' (Acts 1:11) not only to give us the Holy Spirit and empower the disciples to establish the early church, but to return to the Father and continue His priestly ministry of interceding for us (7:25). The ascension is not celebrated in many churches, but it really does need to be a regular and important part of our Christian calendar along with Easter and Pentecost (and Christmas)!

All this is summarised by verse 28, which says the Jesus has been 'made perfect for ever'. In an age in which people are cautious about Christian doctrine, such words stand out as a clarion call to God's people to rediscover the essential truths of their faith. I have heard preachers and teachers tell people that 'doctrine doesn't matter', but they must 'believe in Jesus Christ and have faith in Him!' How extraordinary! Christian doctrine defines and defends the historic truths of our faith and without it people interpret faith as they please! Christian doctrine speaks of all the essentials of our faith, of Christ's purity, and of the complete and all-sufficient nature of His work for our salvation. It also speaks of Jesus' unique priesthood by which He supports us and prays for us forever. This is a marvellous

and frequently lost aspect of our faith, which has often been lost in the undignified and catastrophic rush to ditch Christian doctrine.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How do you picture Jesus as existing today? Do you think of Him as saying prayers for You? If not, why not?
2. What does 'purity' mean when we speak about the purity of Jesus' life? How can we explain this to the world today?
3. How does it help us to know that Jesus was 'perfect'? Can we aim to be perfect like Jesus?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*In today's study, I have issued a challenge to consider that Christian doctrine is not to be thrown away. People argue about Christian doctrine because it is important, and at no other time in the history of the world has it been more important that God's people establish doctrinal clarity about Christian faith. Our divisions today require that we sort out our doctrine, not ditch it, and the sins of those who have distorted it will be dealt with by the Lord. All of us need to measure ourselves against the doctrinal standards of faith found in Scripture, however differently we interpret it; and we need to seek unity in our understanding of Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Church.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Write down what you believe to be the central truths of 'Christian doctrine', and jot down the source of these ideas. Is it worth hanging on to all of these, or should some of them be let go because you have picked them up along the way, but they do not measure up to scripture?*
- *Pray for God's people to be re-invigorated to search for truth and apply it in the world today. Pray that Christian doctrine may do good amongst us and help us define our beliefs and return to doing God's will in our world today.*

## Final Prayer

You are the one and true God, Almighty Father and Lord of all. Within Creation, You have marked the world with the signs of Your ownership, and You hold the secrets of how to overcome evil and You can rectify the way it distorts what is good within the world. Praise be to You, our one and only true and living God. AMEN