

Prayer

Jesus Christ our Saviour, we offer you these promises in faith:
We will worship You in every way open to us throughout this day;
We will live by the truth of Your Word implanted within our hearts;
We will follow You through danger by the guidance of Your counsel;
We will believe that You can help us achieve what appears impossible;
Because the song You have placed in our hearts speaks of glory. ALLELUIA!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Politicians

Systems of democracy around the world are all very different. Pray for the renewal of our democracies and the sincere attempts of Christian politicians to do what is right for God.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for honesty and integrity to be shown by those in public life*
- *Give thanks to God the gift of laughter and fun*
- *Pray for those who face difficult or risky journeys today*

Meditation

Dedicated is the life directed by the Spirit;
Jesus, take my hands in Yours.
Strong is the heart inspired by holiness;
Jesus, purify my heart.

Healthy are the feelings fed by godliness;
Jesus, liberate my emotions.

Powerful is the mind tutored by the Bible;
Jesus, feed me from the Word.

Visionary is the spirit that recognises prophecy;
Jesus, reveal Your Word through me.

Eloquent are the lips that declare the Gospel;
Jesus, use me to preach Good News.

Firm are the feet walking the paths of Faith;
Jesus, guide me on the way.

Infinite is the potential of the work of the Lord;
Jesus, use me according to Your will.

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 to the Hebrews has said about the unique work of Christ for our salvation, and presents it as a summary of the Gospel, adding some helpful insights about 'heavenly things' (9:23,24), and the future judgement (9:27:8). In plain language it tells us the imitations of the old covenant as a copy of 'heavenly things', and by comparison, reveals the genuine nature of what Christ has done (9:24). Whereas the old High Priests repeatedly entered the tabernacle to perform a sacrifice, Jesus has entered the presence of God in heaven itself and presented the 'blood' of his own sacrifice, so that all human sin may be justly accounted for. This opens up a pathway to heaven for all, and creates the possibility of reconciliation with God. This has been the heart of Christian theology and preaching since the Church's earliest days, declaring that Jesus has given us a route to the Father granting both salvation from sin and the assurance of our hope of eternal life.

In the midst of this great announcement, 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 there is a parallel between the whole created order (the 'heavens'), and the world in which we live. Both are under the ultimate authority of God and nothing can escape from His gaze, but we find in the heavens and the earth both good and bad, godliness and sin. However, just as the earthly tabernacle was a place where God dwelt alone and sin was forbidden, there is a place in heaven where evil and sin cannot go, a 'heavenly tabernacle' with a 'holy place' where God alone dwells in the majesty of His Holiness. The old rituals performed on earth reflect what happens in heaven, but what Jesus did through his death, resurrection and ascension, was done equally on earth and in heaven. By breaking the boundaries between earth and heaven, Jesus was able to stand before the Father presenting as the fruit of His work, the reconciliation between earth and heaven that makes eternal salvation possible for all (9:24,28).

If we are to explore this understanding of earth and heaven, then we will need to spend more time with other scriptures, which we cannot do here. However, the picture of heaven presented here is so powerful it invites us to reflect on far more than the meaning of Christ's sacrifice, even though it is central to our faith and salvation. For example, the reading concludes with another insight into heavenly things, which is not to do with what Christ has done for us in the past but what He will do for us in the future, and it is all about judgement. In verse 27, the writer describes how ordinary people die once, and after that, they face the judgement of God. He continues by saying that just as Jesus has died once for our sins, He will then 'appear a second time' (9:28), and this second appearance must therefore be the final 'judgement', for Jesus will certainly not come again to do what He has done before!

The letter of Hebrews therefore draws our attention to a close link between the saving work of Jesus and the final judgement of God, and it is a link which is not so commonly made today in our preaching, and our mission (though our forefathers found it easier than ourselves to do this). The subject of the second coming of our Lord is one that creates much confusion and distress amongst Christians today, and many avoid it because of

misunderstandings and an undue attention to the possible date of this coming. Scripture will not let us forget, however, that the Gospel of Christ we proclaim is also about our eternal judgement and destiny, for these two are irretrievably intertwined. Surely, the good news is that as people saved by the blood of Christ, we may stand before our Lord at the Last Judgement trusting in Jesus. Consequently, we do not have to worry whether we are 'sheep or goats' (as in Jesus' famous parable about God's pure justice – Matt 25:31f.), for our future appearance before God will be awesome, but glorious because of Jesus' love for those who have loved Him. We do not know exactly what we will face before God ourselves and cannot prejudge what God will do with or for anyone else; we can only know that through Christ our own Final Judgement will yield glory.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what this passage says about heaven. What makes sense to you, and what does it mean?
2. How can we proclaim a Gospel which speaks about our eternal destiny, and make it simple?
3. Do you believe the end of time and eternal judgement to be something we should be concerned to hear preached upon today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Have you ever thought much about the way that earthly things reflect heavenly things? The challenge is for us to have a realistic concept of 'heavenly things' based on what we experience now on earth, for this affects our view of what is 'spiritual'. Increasingly in the western world, spiritual values and understanding are pushed out even from the life of the church. All too often, we tag the 'spiritual' onto our general earthy understanding of things by saying a prayer, for example, without attempting to discern spiritual truth which may lie beyond the world's way of doing things. When the Lord brings renewal, His people will rediscover the importance of spiritual things.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In prayer, seek to get your mind around what you mean by the spiritual and eternal, and in parallel but in contrast to this, what is earthly and mortal. Let God guide you to look at other scriptures to explore these thoughts.*
- *Pray for renewal in the church that will make spiritual things more sensible and meaningful to people today, and replace apathy with zeal in the Kingdom of God.*

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, come close when nothing particular is happening, for then we may hear you most clearly. Thank You, Lord Jesus: AMEN